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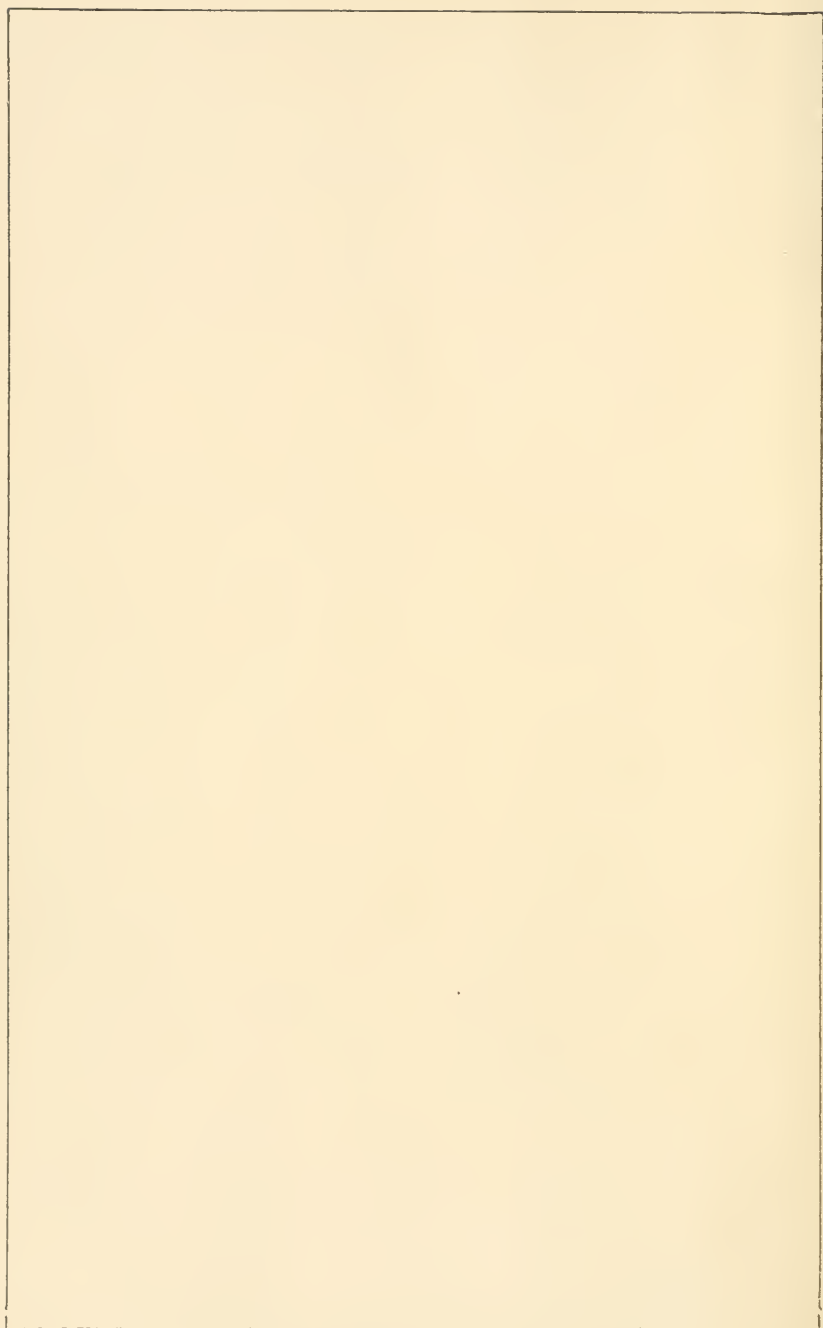
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BEACON LIGHTS:

A SERIES OF SHORT SERMONS.

BY

JOSEPH A. SEISS, D. D., LL. D., L. H. D.,

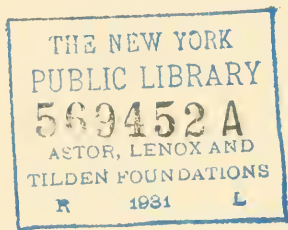
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Lectures on the Gospels and Epistles for the Sundays and Festivals of the
Church Year—On the Apocalypse—On the Book of Daniel—The
Letters of Jesus—The Gospel in Leviticus—A Miracle in
Stone—The Gospel in the Stars, etc., etc.



PHILADELPHIA:
BOARD OF PUBLICATION
OF THE
General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church
IN NORTH AMERICA.
No. 1522 ARCH STREET.
1900.

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PREFACE.

It is a vital truth, never to be overlooked nor allowed to sink out of practical regard, that the supernatural elements in our holy Christianity, and not its mere ethical teachings, constitute its characteristic life and only saving power. The true dignity, inspiration, and effectiveness of the pulpit, as well as the living perpetuity of the Church, depend upon the clearness, emphasis, and supreme prominence given to these elements. If these be explained away, relegated to the background, or superseded by something else, all commanding appeals to the human heart and conscience are disabled, the design of Revelation is contravened, and the sublime purpose of the Christian ministry is subverted. Hence, to voice the Gospel in its sacred fullness, in the plainest, strongest, and most direct way, with its most pungent addresses to the minds and religious sensibilities of men and women, apart from all rationalistic glosses or compromises with popular tendencies and tastes, is the first and paramount

duty of the faithful preacher, tempered of course with the earnest and loving Spirit of the Master himself.

How far this has been successfully carried out in the Sermons here following the readers of them may determine. They differ somewhat from the Author's previous publications in the same line, —not in doctrine and aim, but in condensation and brevity, and in the choice and treatment of free and shorter texts. In these busy times, when the disposition is to avoid elaborate discussions, this feature may the more commend them to popular favor. It will the better fit them for use in families and for lay-reading in churches in the absence of a regular minister. They have been selected from a mass of the author's preparations for the pulpit. They have all been preached, and are here printed as preached. And they are thus given to the public with the hope and prayer that God may own and bless them to the edification of His Church, the maintenance of the true faith, and the furtherance of genuine piety. To the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, one God, be the glory for all, both now and forever.

AMEN.

CONTENTS.

SALVATION COMETH. Pp. 13-22.

(First Sunday in Advent.)

"For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand."—ROM. 13 : 11, 12.

THE PROMISED DELIVERANCE. Pp. 23-30.

(Second Sunday in Advent.)

"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."—LUKE 21 : 36.

A GREAT MAN'S PERPLEXITY. Pp. 31-41.

(Third Sunday in Advent.)

"Now when John heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto Him, Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another."—MATT. 11 : 2, 3.

THE JOY OF FAITH. Pp. 41-49.

(Fourth Sunday in Advent.)

"Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice."—PHIL. 4 : 4.

THE GLAD NATIVITY. Pp. 50-57.

(Christmas.)

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared."—TITUS 2 : 11.

THE GRACIOUS ERRAND. Pp. 58-63.

(Sunday after Christmas.)

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."—LUKE 19 : 10.

A NOBLE TESTIMONY. Pp. 64-73.

(Epiphany.)

"Behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him."—MATT. 2 : 1, 2.

THE OFFENDED NAZARENES. Pp. 74-82.

(First Sunday after Epiphany.)

"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him."—MARK 6 : 3.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. Pp. 83-89.

(Second Sunday after Epiphany.)

"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the Light of the world : he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."—JNO. 8 : 12.

A MARVELLOUS BELIEVER. Pp. 90-99.

(Third Sunday after Epiphany.)

"When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said unto them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."—MATT. 8 : 10.

THE FRIGHTENED VOYAGERS. Pp. 100-108.

(Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.)

"And He said unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"—MATT. 8 : 26.

THE GOSPEL YOKE. Pp. 109-116.

(Fifth Sunday after Epiphany.)

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."—MATT. 11 : 29, 30.

THE CHRISTIAN STADIUM. Pp. 117-125.

(Septuagesima.)

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? . . . Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible."—1 COR. 9 : 24, 25.

RESPECTFUL HEARING. Pp. 126-135.

(Sexagesima.)

"And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them."—EZEK. 33 : 31.

THE PASSING SAVIOUR. Pp. 136-144.

(Quinquagesima.)

"And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by."—LUKE 18 : 37.

THE LENTEN CALL. Pp. 145-153.

(Ash Wednesday.)

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—MATT. 11 : 28.

SATANIC SIFTINGS. Pp. 154-161.

(First Sunday in Lent.)

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat : but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."—LUKE 22 : 31.

THE SUPREME INQUIRY. Pp. 162-171.

(Second Sunday in Lent.)

"Dost thou believe on the Son of God."—JNO. 9 : 35.

HEAVENLY SYMPATHY. Pp. 172-180.

(Third Sunday in Lent.)

"I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."—LUKE 15 : 10.

THE MUNIFICENT SAVIOUR. Pp. 181-190.

(Fourth Sunday in Lent.)

"When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat."—JNO. 6 : 5.

THE ALL-AVAILING OFFERING. Pp. 191-200.

(Fifth Sunday in Lent.)

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh : how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."—HEB. 9 : 13, 14.

THE MOUNTED KING. Pp. 201-208.

(*Palm Sunday.*)

"Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass."—MATT. 21 : 5.

VOICES FROM THE CROSS. Pp. 209-215.

(*Good Friday.*)

"When they were come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him."—LUKE 23 : 33.

THE DAY OF GLADNESS. Pp. 216-223.

(*Easter Sunday.*)

"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."—PS. 118 : 24.

RELIGIOUS CERTITUDE. Pp. 224-231.

(*First Sunday after Easter.*)

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience."—HEB. 10 : 22.

HEAVENLY GUARDIANSHIP. Pp. 232-239.

(*Second Sunday after Easter.*)

"The Lord is my Shepherd."—PS. 23 : 1.

KNOWING THE LORD. Pp. 240-247.

(*Third Sunday after Easter.*)

"And none of the disciples durst ask Him, Who art thou? Knowing that it was the Lord."—JOHN 21 : 12.

THE REFRESHING WORD. Pp. 248-256.

(*Fourth Sunday after Easter.*)

"Hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass."—DEUT. 32 : 1, 2.

DIVINE JEWELS. Pp. 257-265.

(*Fifth Sunday after Easter.*)

"And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."—MAL. 3 : 17.

THE SUBLIME DEPARTURE. Pp. 266-271.

(*Ascension Day.*)

"And a cloud received Him out of their sight."—ACTS 1 : 9.

HEAVENLY ENTHRONEMENT. Pp. 272-279.

(Sunday after Ascension Day.)

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."—PS. 110 : 1.

STRENGTH AND COMFORT. Pp. 280-286.

(Whit Sunday.)

"They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."—ISA. 40 : 31.

THE ADORABLE GODHEAD. Pp. 287-296.

(Trinity Sunday.)

"For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."—ROM. 11 : 36.

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT. Pp. 297-305.

(First Sunday after Trinity.)

"His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."—MATT. 25 : 23.

DIFFERENCE IN WORSHIPPERS. Pp. 306-316.

(Second Sunday after Trinity.)

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican."—LUKE 18 : 10.

THE SINNER'S FRIEND. Pp. 317-323.

(Third Sunday after Trinity.)

"And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."—LUKE 15 : 2.

SEEKING AND FINDING. Pp. 324-329.

(Fourth Sunday after Trinity.)

"They found Him on the other side of the sea."—JNO. 6 : 25.

THE TEMPLE GATES. Pp. 330-339.

(Fifth Sunday after Trinity.)

"He that entereth in by the way of the North gate to worship shall go out by the way of the South gate; and he that entereth in by the way of the South gate shall go out by the way of the North gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it. And the Prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and when they go forth, shall go forth."—EZEK. 46 : 9, 10.

THE BLESSED RIVER. Pp. 340-349.

(Sixth Sunday after Trinity.)

"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."—PS. 46 : 4.

THE PERISHING SPENDTHRIFT. Pp. 350-360.

(Seventh Sunday after Trinity.)

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger."—LUKE 15 : 17.

THE WAY TO THE FATHER. Pp. 361-369.

(Eighth Sunday after Trinity.)

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."—JNO. 14-6.

BLESSED PRIVILEGE. Pp. 370-376.

(Ninth Sunday after Trinity.)

"And He turned Him unto His disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things which ye see; for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see the things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."—LUKE 10 : 23, 24.

DANGEROUS EXPOSURE. Pp. 377-387.

(Tenth Sunday after Trinity.)

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."—COL. 2 : 8.

A SERIOUS PROBLEM. Pp. 388-396.

(Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.)

"Wherefore do the wicked live?"—JOB 21 : 7.

GRACIOUS THOUGHTS. Pp. 397-405.

(Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.)

"I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil."—JER. 29 : 11.

PERSISTENT FAITH. Pp. 406-411.

(Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.)

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."—JOB 13 : 15.

A GREAT CURE. Pp. 412-421.

(Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.)

"And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."—2 KINGS 5 : 14.

FUTILITY OF A DIVIDED SERVICE. Pp. 422-429.

(Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.)

"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."—MATT. 6 : 24.

A STANDING PROCLAMATION. Pp. 430-437.

(Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity.)

"Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."—JNO. 6 : 37.

BENEDICTIONS UPON THE WRESTLER. Pp. 438-444.

(Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity.)

"I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon."—HOSEA 14 : 5, 6.

THE MESSAGE OF CONSOLATION. Pp. 445-453.

(Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity.)

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned."—ISA. 40 : 1, 2.

A DISASTROUS CHOICE. Pp. 454-464.

(Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.)

"And Lot . . . pitched his tent toward Sodom."—GEN. 13 : 12.

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN. Pp. 465-476.

(Twentieth Sunday after Trinity.)

"How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water."—JNO. 4 : 9, 10.

THE TEARS OF JESUS. Pp. 477-485.

(Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity.)

"And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it."—LUKE 19 : 41.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF LIFE. Pp. 486-495.

(Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity.)

"For a living dog is better than a dead lion."—ECCLES. 9 : 4.

THE FRUITLESS TREE. Pp. 496-502.

(Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity.)

"Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this figtree, and find none : cut it down : why cumbereth it the ground ?"—LUKE 13 : 7.

THE LOST CHANCE. Pp. 503-517.

(Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity.)

"The harvest is past, the summer ended, and we are not saved."—JER. 8 : 20.

ZEAL FOR GOD. Pp. 518-529.

(Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity.)

"And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord."—2 KINGS 10 : 16.

THE GLORIOUS BEYOND. Pp. 530-539.

(Twenty-sixth Sunday after Trinity.)

"And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."—MARK 9 : 1.

Salvation Cometh.

First Sunday in Advent.

For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.—ROM. 13 : 11.



SALVATION! *Our* salvation! Our salvation, *nearing and at hand!* This is the salutation with which the opening of the new Church-year greets us to-day. The word is to *believers*, to those who have heard of Christ, accepted Christ, and are hoping for eternal life through Him.

The little word "for," at the beginning of the text, intimates that the statements it contains are meant to serve as a reason, motive, and argument for certain activities and duties with which they stand connected. The persons addressed are contemplated as more or less asleep and oblivious to the great matters of which the apostle is treating, and these great and startling facts are stated to arouse them from their slumbers, and to get them fully awake to their situation, so as to bestir themselves accordingly.

There is no difficulty in understanding this drowsy and sleepy condition as it applies to those who make no pretensions to religion. It is night

with them; and they are spiritually in the state which night brings. They are like men asleep. They have no right sensibility. They neither see, nor feel, nor care for the things of God, nor the condition and needs of their souls. They may be dreaming of security and happiness, but the real situation they do not take in. Being asleep, they are inactive, and as good as dead, touching the great things of salvation. What they need above all is to be aroused to spiritual consciousness, and stirred up to active life and duty, or they will sleep the sleep of death, to awake when it is too late to be of avail. And although sometimes temporarily disturbed by the alarms which God's word rings into their ears, or by the divine judgments which strike by their sides and in their homes, they put off the needed action by the plea of "time enough yet," and are presently as deep in the old slumbers as before.

But the implication here is, that even Christian believers are liable to be dull and drowsy with reference to the things that make for salvation. Even in those apostolic times, when Jewish and heathen persecutions tended to make Christians such in very truth or not at all, many were so dull and sluggish in their piety as to need stirring up. Though things were so warm and sharp about them, and the conflict so intense, that we can hardly see how it was possible for them to sleep, yet they did often sleep, perhaps not in such dead sleep as the indifferent and unbelieving, but still in a condition so dull and sluggish as

to need the apostle's sharp admonition to stir them up to greater earnestness and devotion.

People are not apt to become thorough saints at a single bound. Much of the old deadness and depravity still clings even to the most enlightened. The good work begun in them needs culture and nursing, and oft revival of energy and exertion, to be kept up to the mark. While the bridegroom tarried all the virgins became drowsy and slept; and so it frequently is with Christians. Once awake and active, they subsequently begin to consult their own ease, yield more or less to the fashion and current of things about them, leave off one and another of their Christian duties, become dilatory and self-excusing, and wonder to themselves sometimes whether it is worth their while to give so much attention, work, and anxiety to religious matters. Carnal likes and laziness plead for indulgence, and they get it. The spiritual life sinks, languishes, and largely disappears. Sleepiness takes the place of proper feeling and the necessary zeal and faithfulness. The things of God, heaven, and duty cease to touch, impress, and animate them as once. They do not trouble to call themselves to account for their way of living and doing. They take for granted that all is right. They have joined the Church; they confess the orthodox faith; their consciences are not burdened with any worse life than the average of Christian people; and so they rest. They have done good service in the past, and think now let others take the place and do as

well, while they retire. Yes, there be many professed Christians who are not only drowsy, but almost as fast asleep as those who have never been spiritually awakened at all. And it would be well if we were free from the reproach. Now such a condition is no credit to any one, and is so dangerous and so much of a hindrance and scandal to the Christian profession that the apostle is very anxious to have it broken up. And the Church, in setting his words before us to-day, would have us make a new start with the new Church-year. She would have us know and feel that the time for greater wakefulness is here; that sleep and drowsiness are now quite out of place; that our proper business is to throw off slumber, listlessness, and what pertains to the night, and equip ourselves for the work and battle of the children of light.

And that the admonition may not be without effect, let us consider what we have at stake. Think of the soul; that living inspiration of God, by which we were made to resemble Him, and to live in blessed fellowship with Him forever. Think of the preciousness of being that has thus come to us, and the sublimity of its capacity for expansion, growth, usefulness, and enjoyment. What indeed can a man give in exchange for his soul? The material world and all things in it cannot represent the value of the soul. Created for eternity and for eternal alliance with the Father of spirits, no limit can be set to its worth.

And what if the soul should be lost! Who can

compute so great a calamity! People sometimes lose valued and dear friends, and are crushed almost to death under the loss. But the loss of friends is not the loss of everything. Jesus still lives. Heaven may still be ours. The separation need not be forever. And some kind ones remain to help with their sympathy. But when the soul is lost all is lost. No one is left to condole with us—no refuge to which to look—no hope—no means of overcoming or moderating the grief—no end to the misery. When the soul is lost all capacity for improvement and happiness is gone. Other losses may be without our fault; but the loss of the soul imprints upon it the immortal consciousness of its own wicked folly and fills it with incurable remorse. O the depths of the wretchedness and privations of a lost soul!

Think also of the perils of incurring this loss. Not one of us is beyond the reach of danger. In the natural course of things the chances are largely against us. We were all born with a tainted nature, biased toward evil as sparks fly upward, and with every constitutional tendency that makes for our utter ruin, if not arrested by some supernatural power. The enemy of our peace thus already has property in every one of us. And while inwardly impelled to wrong, and disinclined to lay hold of the proffered help, the whole world around us is full of temptations and treacherous persuasions adverse to our salvation. We cannot take a decisive step in the line of the soul's eternal safety, but we must fight our way through

many contentions within and without. It is easy enough to profess Christianity, for that is a sort of fashion that society in general approves; but it is a very much harder thing to be a Christian in reality, and to hold out in it with growing fidelity to the end. And in view of these facts it is great folly for you or me to think we are in no danger of losing our souls. There is danger; and we do intense injustice to our eternal well-being by failure to consider and believe it.

Consider also the costly provisions that have been made for our rescue and deliverance. Unfavorable and imperilled as our condition is, there is no need for any of us to be finally lost. There is such a thing as Salvation—salvation for each of us—salvation even for the worst and wickedest. And far greater than the loss of the soul, on the one hand, is the salvation of it on the other. What a stir was in the mind and heart of God and in the counsels of eternity when it was decreed to provide redemption for our fallen race! What a humiliation and sacrifice of the eternal Son of the Father, and what a hell of anguish had He to endure, in order to open for us the doors of deliverance! What added activities of angels, and toils of men, and providential expenditures, extending through the ages, were required to bring to us the offers of forgiveness, sanctification, and eternal life, through faith in Jesus! And who can contemplate these momentous facts and not feel the gross ingratitude, shame, and guilt of sleepy and slothful indifference to what has been

done and endured to render our salvation possible!

Consider also what that salvation means to a condemned and perishing soul. If it were a license for the mere temporary indulgence of the likes and pleasures of sense—an offer of earthly gain, power, or honor—the proposal of exemption from bodily infirmity, sickness, or disability—we may be sure that hearers would instantly start up with ample interest and energy to possess it. Is it nothing for a criminal, sentenced to be hung, to have sealed pardon and release brought to him from the King? Yet here is authentic pardon and release from an infinitely worse condemnation. Here is cure for an infinitely worse disease than ever assailed a human body. Here is provision for a life that never dies—a life akin to the life of angels and the life of God—a life of unending expansion in light and glory—a life in all the highest blessedness and sublimities of immortal being. And is there nothing in all this to awaken interest and zeal in souls so ailing, and needy, and helpless, and doomed amid their trespasses and sins? O the transcendent good fortune to him to whom Christ is made his wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption! Even in this life there is a peace in believing, a safety of soul, and a joy in God, which no troubles can drown, and no adversities destroy, to say nothing of the life that is to come. And shall we not care to possess them?

And the greatness of salvation, when once

fully complete, who shall tell it? Think of a world regenerated, redeemed, and freed from all presence and effects of sin and sinners. Think of a society in which all are saints and equal unto the angels. Think of unending and ever-growing life in the smile of God, under the effulgence of the Sun of Righteousness and in visible association with the King in His beauty. This, and nothing less, shall mark the consummation of salvation in the time to come.

And this glorious consummation is now near at hand, and daily impending. Death may overtake us any day or hour, and death brings one far on the way to the final settlement of complete salvation or utter failure. But Advent-time points onward to the nearing coming of the Lord himself, to be glorified in His saints, to complete the redemption of His people, and to be admired in all them that believe. It will be too late then for dull sleepers to awake in time to be admitted to the marriage of the Lamb. And because we know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh, and are admonished by a thousand signs that His coming cannot now be long delayed, the urgent message is, to put away from us all carnal slumbers, to break away from all works of darkness, and to steady ourselves in faith and duty for what is before us. The doors stand open to us now; but who knows how soon they may be shut against all unready sleepers!

And what must be the consequence if we neglect

so great salvation? Its offers are made to us now—offers the costliest the universe has ever known; and how shall we escape if we disregard and neglect them? Its means are now within our reach. The grace of God which bringeth salvation is here, present and potent in the word and sacraments, and abundantly efficacious for all who diligently avail themselves of them. And how shall we escape if we turn our backs upon them and prefer to indulge our sloth and indolence? Much time has already gone to waste. Much neglectfulness and criminal indifference can be charged against us all. Our best piety has been very infirm, and our prayers often more a travesty than proper devotion even when not omitted and forgotten. While many have not made any one decisive move in the momentous matter, yet the way is still open, and again the gracious warning comes to admonish us that our time is growing short. And how shall we escape if we continue to slumber on in such a dead or dying state?

Dear friends, if you were told for a certainty that this is the last sermon you will ever hear, that this is the last Advent season you will ever see this side of the great day, are you satisfied that you are safe and ready in the state and manner of life in which you now are? If not, is it not then high time to awake out of sleep, to stir up energy for a more earnest and vigorous devotion, faith, and Christian life; to abate and crucify earthly vanities and ambitions, and to think, and live, and do for God, the soul, and eternity, that

that day may not come upon you unawares? Salvation is provided. It is salvation for us. And it is salvation that must soon be accomplished. By no means then let us sleep as do others, and neglect it.

The Promised Deliberance.

Second Sunday in Advent.

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.—LUKE 21 : 36.



THE context of these words treats of a momentous crisis in this world's history. Reason itself, apart from revelation, might anticipate something of it. Everything that lives, or moves, of which we have any knowledge, is plainly tending to a time when it comes to its fullness, and a marvellous change occurs. Conscience also suggests some great moral juncture as the harvest of what mankind has been sowing,—some decisive outcome and consummation that will explain the many riddles which perplex our philosophies. Even the heathen were persuaded that there must come a time of judgment and retribution for the world, as for the individuals who inhabit it. But, when we go to the sacred Scriptures, given by inspiration of God, we are left in no doubt that "He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness." And the main features of that great crisis, as also the chief

duties by means of which to secure our safety when it comes, are duly set forth.

First of all, it is described as a time of alarming portents, commotions, and distresses. The Saviour tells of strange and terrifying disturbances in earth, and sea, and sky, and such startling manifestations everywhere, that men's hearts will fail them for fear, and many will faint and perish for very terror at what is coming on the earth. Nay, the word is, that the very stabilities and powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

We may not be able to explain accurately what all is meant by these terms; but they certainly include great and terrible convulsions. The Scriptures, in many places, speak of those times as dreadful in the extreme. They are called "the great and terrible day of the Lord," when mountains and islands are shaken out of their places, and many flee for safety to the dens and caves of the earth, calling upon the rocks to fall on them, to hide them from the scenes then to be manifested.

But, with all, it is the time of redemption for God's people. The Saviour says, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

There is a redemption of *price*; and there is a redemption of *power*: the one past, and the other yet to come. The price was paid when Christ surrendered His life for us on the cross, so that there is now no more condemnation to those who

believe on Him. But we are still helpless, and subject to disease, pain, and death. There must be the putting forth of power to lift us out of our many weaknesses and miseries, to recover us from corruption and death, in order to complete our salvation. And the time for that is this very judgment time. With all its alarming accompaniments to the common world, it will be a time of superlative blessedness and glory to the saints.

Furthermore, it is the time of the promised return of our Saviour. The statement is, "Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." From the day that Jesus ascended to heaven from Mount Olivet, the chief consolation of the Church was "that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." And yet, how many persist in neglecting it, and in explaining it away! The world of our time is specially skeptical on this point, and there be plenty of scoffers to say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" But the Lord is not slack concerning His promises as some men count slackness. He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. No unbelief of men will stay His chariot wheels. And when He does come, woe to them that despise or make light of His word!

But the text speaks particularly of a way of escape from all these things, before the worst comes.

It must be borne in mind that what is called the Second Advent, like the first, will not be all

at once, on a single day or hour, or in one scene or act. It will embrace different stages and manifestations, extending through years. There is, first, a coming "as a thief in the night," unperceived by the common world, and known only by the absence of what has been taken. The Scriptures tell of a *parousia*,—a presence; and of an *epiphania* of that *parousia*,—a showing of that presence; with an interval between covering many acts of judgment upon the living world. In the one case, Christ comes *for* His people, and then afterwards comes *with* them. And His coming *for* His people is at the beginning of the great judgment time; and only later on will He so come as that "every eye shall see Him."

The very first thing, then, will be the sudden and miraculous taking away of His ready and waiting people to meet Him in the heavenly regions. Paul gives it as a special word of the Lord, that when He shall come, "the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." So again he says, "Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep,—not all die,—but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." And this sudden ereption from the earth to the heavenly spaces, is what is described in the text as being "accounted worthy to stand before the Son of Man," quite saved from the terrible things then to befall the unbelieving world.

It was thus promise was given to certain of the Church of Philadelphia, saying, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, which is to come upon the whole world." And it is most of all to this exemption by means of translation, as Enoch was translated, that it is said of the righteous man, "When the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it."

There is, then, such a thing as being saved from the terrors and sorrows of the great judgment time; and saved even from death itself, if living when that time comes. The only great matter on our part is, to be prepared and in condition for the blessed exemption. And what such readiness involves is sufficiently set forth.

First of all, this exemption was promised only to *Christians*—to the followers of Christ. No such hopes are anywhere held out to non-Christians, heathen, or unbelievers. A Christian is one who accepts Christ for his Saviour, and obediently submits himself to Christ's ordinances and commands. And where there is no orderly enlistment under the Christian banner, there is no word of hope against the terrible trials of the great day. Furthermore, there must be careful guard against carnal and worldly excesses, which weigh down the soul and choke spirituality. Surfeiting, drunkenness, debauchery, and all wicked indulgences, as well as too much engrossment with the cares and interests of this present life, must be avoided; for there can be no standing

with the Son of Man if overtaken in what so ill befits a Christian. There be many whom that day will take unawares, as a snare upon an unsuspecting animal, because too much preoccupied with earthly cares and vanities. Even otherwise Christian people may imperil everything by lack of carefulness on this point.

Another direction is *to watch*. This is one of the Saviour's oftenest spoken and most emphasized admonitions; and it means constant wakefulness and expectancy. It means the treatment of the coming of the great day as a fixed and undoubted certainty, and the time an absolute uncertainty. If we do not believe in any such crisis to come, we cannot be watching for it; nor can we rightly watch for it if we persuade ourselves that it cannot come in our lifetime.

And, with this watching, there must needs also be continuous *praying*. The word is, "Watch, *and pray always*, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." Prayer is as essential to true religion as language to poetry, or the atmosphere to music, or thinking to philosophy. There is no Christian life which does not voice itself in prayer. How indeed can one love God who never speaks to Him, and avoids all communion with Him!

But our praying must include a specific and earnest aim and desire for this exemption from the tribulations of the judgment times. We may die before Christ comes; but if we die expecting,

watching, and looking for Him, as if He may come while we are yet alive, we certainly shall not fail to be among those who sleep in Jesus, and whom He will bring with Him when He comes. In this line, therefore, are we to direct our aspirations and our prayers, being duly careful also to live as we pray.

And the nearer that time may be, the more cause there is for us to rejoice. However mysterious and solemn, we are abundantly certified that it will be in all respects a blessed time to those who have made Jesus their trust and hope. Our Lord speaks of it as the time of our redemption, the opening of a glorious summertime for the Kingdom of God. Having been "once offered to bear the sins of many; unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

And a great and blessed salvation it will be. What all is involved we cannot fully tell.

Think of change from mortal to immortality without tasting of death!

Think of these coarse, cumbrous, earthy, aching, dying bodies suddenly transfigured into the likeness and beauty of the glorious body of Jesus, lifted into equality with angels, and purged of all weaknesses, weariness, and waste!

Think of painless and triumphant escape from a world smarting under the curse, convulsed with judgment, and tortured with the throes of approaching dissolution!

Think of mounting up, as on eagles' wings, to

the heights above the clouds, there to stand accepted before the Son of Man!

Think of the blessedness of meeting that Saviour whom we love, seeing Him as He is, and being ever with Him!

Think of the immortal crowns, the golden seats, and the sublime association with the King of Glory in His judgment of the world!

Think of the excellences of the new heavens and earth, and of Kingly rule with Jesus there, where tribulation, tears, and death are forever done away!

O dear friends, is not this enough to make us rejoice, and be glad at sight of signals that the time is near? Who indeed can enter into the subject as the Scriptures present it, and not feel the prayer rising to his lips: Come, O Thou Prince of all the Kings of the earth! Put on the visible robes of Thy imperial Majesty, and come; for now the voice of Thy Bride calleth Thee, and all creatures sigh to be renewed. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

A Great Man's Perplexity.

Third Sunday in Advent.

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto Him, Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?—MATT. 11 : 2, 3.



VERY great and good man is here brought to our attention. He was greater than the prophets that were before him,—greater in his own department than any that had lived. Of this we have the testimony of Christ himself, who declared that “Among them that are born of women there had not risen a greater than John the Baptist.” He was also a great preacher. He thrilled the nation with his eloquence. Crowds, from Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the regions round about Jordan, including Pharisees, Sadducees, and people of all classes, flocked to hear him, and to be baptized by him. And what is more, the one great topic of his preaching was, the coming of the Christ and the needed preparation to stand before Him, which is everywhere the great theme of the Scriptures, and of all the inspired prophets, apostles, and greatest preachers.

Yet, strange to say, we here find this great,

good, and powerful man "in prison." He had dared to rebuke sin in high places; and he was arrested and locked up for it. This shows what God's faithful servants are likely to receive from the unsanctified world. Men may apologize for it as they please; but it has ever been resentful and ill-tempered toward honest truth-tellers and messengers of Heaven. It may respect and hear them for a time, and give them right in many things so long as favorite lusts are not assailed, and easy-going selfishness is not disturbed; but the moment carnal likes are crossed, and the demands of righteousness are pressed, the soul flushes with displeasure and resentment. When has there ever been a holy prophet who did not meet with a surly reception at the seats of earthly power? The Herods carousing in their palaces, and the Johns pining in their prisons, is a type of the common history. People may flatter themselves that human nature is changed, and that the world of to-day is animated by a different spirit; but the offence of the cross has not ceased. Let the test be applied, and the carnal mind will be found, as always, at enmity with God. It spat on Christ and nailed Him to the cross; and whatever civility it may show under modern constraints, it is ever ready to discount the standing of true Christians, to pass them by with smiles that are sneers, and to despise and hate those who courageously assail its wickednesses. It will not be so always. There is a day of righteous retribution coming, when all these inequalities shall be

rectified. But in the present order of things, and while this dispensation lasts, the good and faithful cannot expect to get their reward here. The Church of Christ is bound to bear the cross till Christ comes for her deliverance.

For a time John was not unhappy in his imprisonment. A good conscience is a great comfort when a man is wrongfully dealt with; and a man like John the Baptist would willingly suffer rather than be untrue to his commission or unfaithful to his ministry. But he was sustained by a higher consolation. He believed in the nearness and presence of the great Judge himself. Of this he was profoundly convinced. He had had the evidence from God that the Messiah was then already in the world. He had heard the voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He had baptized Jesus, and had seen the Holy Ghost descend upon Him, and testified, saying, "He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bear record that *this is the Son of God.*" He had repeatedly pointed to Jesus, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." He was, therefore, sure that the great Lord and Judge was already present, with fan in hand to separate the chaff from the wheat, and about to burn it up with unquenchable fire. He knew that it was part of the great Messiah's work to

bring blessed deliverance to His people, to open the prison doors to them that were bound, and to visit judgment upon their oppressors. This is what he had preached. And the persuasion that, in a little while, the Saviour would avenge the wrongs he suffered, dethrone the tyrant, and clothe His faithful servant and forerunner with glory and honor, was a special consolation to him.

There is a marvellous power in the doctrine of the near coming of the Christ. It is specially adapted to comfort and sustain believers amid their earthly tribulations. Its adversaries have called it the doctrine for evil times, which, to its credit, it surely is. It blunts the edge of afflictions. Nothing can crush the spirit that is daily looking for the coming of the Lord with full redemption for His people and ample compensations for all their pains and hardships here endured. And this it was that upheld and cheered the soul of this baptizer in his imprisonment.

But, with all his confident anticipations, he was presently overtaken with a sore mental perplexity. What it was the text indicates. When he heard in the prison the works of Christ, and what blessed things were being done for other people, he could not understand why nothing was done for him. Was he not a sufferer for truth's sake? Had he not been faithful to his mission? If anybody was to be favored, was he not entitled to it, at least to the extent of being given his liberty? Was he not Christ's own relative? and had he not also accredited Him as the Christ? How was it

then that he was left to pine in prison, while his oppressor was left to flourish? He was sure that Jesus was the Christ, and he knew what work of righteous judgment the Christ was to perform, and yet that work was not being done as he conceived it.

The plain truth is, that John was not only mystified, but hurt; I might say somewhat *offended*. Like all the Old Testament prophets, he had not learned to distinguish between the two Advents. He was under the persuasion that everything prophesied of the Christ was to be fulfilled and accomplished all at once; and the slowness of the Saviour to take in hand to destroy the wicked, and deliver His faithful relative and forerunner, confused his thinking, disappointed his faith, and somewhat ruffled his feelings.

It is not uncommon for believers, even those strongest in faith, to be thrown into perplexity and distressing questionings. Luther, with all his robust faith and confidence in the divine word, had his days of spiritual anguish and despondency. Bunyan, with a spirit of assurance that could body forth things unseen as if he saw, and heard, and could touch them, tells of times when he felt so assailed and dismantled that the very foundations of his faith and hope seemed stricken from under him. Nor is it to be wondered that John, so long wasting in prison, so sure that the Christ had come, and counting so firmly that all the prophets had said of Him was now to be fulfilled without further delay, was

thrown into a sad condition of mind and feeling when he heard of the works of Christ, that they were nothing but mercy to the poor and afflicted, while the tyrant was undisturbed, and he was left to suffer for righteousness' sake. It could not well have been otherwise, believing as he did. The very faith and confidence of Christians may sometimes be troubled with puzzles and confusing disappointments through imperfect apprehensions and erring expectations.

But hurt, perplexed, and disappointed as John was, he pursued the right course for relief. He did not sulk in resentful anger, or impatiently drop the whole matter as no longer worthy of his attention. It was a thing too solemn for that; and he was too great a man to surrender to such pettish littleness. He resolved to bring his feelings to the attention of Christ himself, and first get what He had to say by way of explanation. A prisoner in jail, he could not go himself; therefore he sent "two of his disciples" to carry and represent his case.

Many would have disdained such a course. Even good people take up prejudices and strong dislikes from very much smaller things, which they interpret as slights, and are quick to resent. Construing a thing into an offence, they refuse to have any more to do with the one concerned. Some reason themselves into unpleasant doubts and perplexities in matters of religion, and then stand aloof, more than half skeptical, because they cannot reason themselves out again. People

find it hard to make the truths of revelation, or the plans and doings of God, answer to their preconceptions and crude notions; and, right off, Christ, and Church, and sacraments, and all faith, are consigned to the dogs. And some esteem it manly and intellectual so to order themselves. To right thinkers there is no greater imbecility. All just reason, and all proper feeling, are on the side of John. Because he was hurt, and tried, and thrown into a whirl of distressing perturbation with respect to Christ, he did not throw aside his former confidence, or drop all further interest in his Lord. He would first bring the matter to the One he was disposed to blame, and give chance for some modifying solution of the trouble. Nor can we ever do better than to follow his example in all such cases.

John's course proved a happy success. With the utmost sympathy and kindness, the merciful Saviour answered to his message, although it had in it the tone of dissatisfaction and complaint, if not of censure. Jesus knew the goodness, honesty, and fidelity of the great baptizer, and could appreciate his trouble. There was really no flaw in the matter at which John felt so perplexed and offended. All was going exactly right. John was not mistaken in his identification of Jesus as the Christ; and all was bound to come out as was predicted. Only he was too far in advance in his expectations. Had he fully estimated and understood "the works" of which he had heard, he would have seen that the Messianic activities

were going on, and that very power being exercised which would accomplish all; only the time for the final judgment, and the violent suppression of Herod and all anti-Christianism had not yet come. Such was the tenor of the Lord's reply, directing the messengers to show John *again* what was being done, and sent His Messianic benediction upon His hurt and perturbed friend, saying, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me."

It was enough. It pacified the illustrious prisoner. It assured him that Christ knew what He was about, and that all would come out right, as God planned and prophets foretold. It helped to reconcile him to his situation. It comforted and relieved his perturbed spirit. It taught him patience and rest in the blessed Lamb of God. And so he passed in triumph to a martyr's crown.

Yes, if you feel offended with your friend, go to him first; tell him of your feelings; hear his side of the matter without prejudice; and the chances are that the trouble will be much abated, and probably entirely removed. And if your cherished hopes and ideas in matters of religious faith meet with disappointing and vexatious reverses, and your experiences do not turn out as you supposed; go to Jesus; consider more carefully His method, purposes, and word. Look again at what you thought you so well understood, and prayerfully seek the light you need; and you will not be left without comforting satisfaction. Try it; imitate the great baptizer in his

perplexity; and you will never have cause to regret it. Nay, whatever we may think or feel, of this we may be sure, as John was assured:

1. *The word of the Lord stands firm.* Forty centuries had passed, and multitudinous changes and revolutions had rolled over the world from the time the first promise of the victorious seed of the woman was given; and yet He had not come. But the word was neither dead nor forgotten by Him who gave it. When the fullness of the time was come, He came. With all the unbelief and apostacies of men, and with all the machinations of hell, there was no failure of what the Lord had spoken. Let come what will; let erring reason question and doubt as it may; the word of the Lord stands firm.

2. *The work of the Lord goes on.* Unseemly and doubtful as may be the appearances, there is neither hindrance nor stoppage to the outworking of Jehovah's will and purposes. Elijah may despond, and give up all for lost. John may be driven to extremities, and feel as if compelled to surrender what he so honestly believed and so earnestly preached. And the wiseacres of this world may give out that the Church is moribund; that the hopes of the saints are flickering to extinction; that the old faith must go. But, God is on the throne. His cause is ever safe. And, amid all the turmoil, the changes, and the doubts, the work of the Lord goes on.

3. *And the consummation cometh.* Unbelief may vaunt itself and ask, "Where is the promise

of His coming?" Scientists may argue the permanence of nature, and claim that, "since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as from the beginning of the creation." The very Church itself may become oblivious to the foreshowings of the prophetic word. But "the Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness." He has no cause for haste. Eternity is His. And what He has begun He will carry to completion. In the decrees of invincible Godhead it is settled that "the Lord will come, and will not keep silence;" and that out of the ashes of a world baptized and cleansed by fire shall come "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

And what, then, dear friends, is the great matter for us? The way of duty is plainly given. We must hold fast our faith. We must have confidence in the Christ. And "seeing that we look for such things," we must be diligent, in order to be found of our Lord in peace, without spot, and blameless.

The Joy of Faith.

Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice.—PHIL. 4 : 4.



IT would seem that the apostle considered it the privilege and duty of all Christians to be uninterruptedly happy and joyous. This is a very remarkable presentation.

It is remarkable, as coming from St. Paul, who was a man of incessant toil and tribulation, ever in conflict with visible and invisible powers, an example of sufferings which made him a spectacle to men and angels, and a man whose temper was intensely serious, severe, and vehement.

It is remarkable, in view of the ordinary state of mankind in this world, which is everywhere mixed with sorrow, the sunshine often interrupted, and the shadows often very deep.

It is remarkable, in being addressed to these Philippians; who were much grieved over their apostle's imprisonment at Rome; who, with Christians in general at that time, were in constant anxiety by reason of abounding persecution, and around whom everything was more or less adverse to their peace of mind.

It is remarkable, also, in being placed in spe-

cific connection with the prospect of the speedy coming of the Lord; regarded usually as a matter of solemn fear and awe, calling rather for the utmost seriousness and anxious concern.

And it is well worthy of our devout consideration that such a man, at such a time, to such people, under such apprehensions, should give it as a matter of privilege and duty, not only to be free from all saddening depression and disturbing perturbation, but to be cheerful and happy withal, maintaining a mood and temper of constant and peaceful rejoicing.

Many have the notion that to be a Christian is to be austere, morose, gloomy, and adverse to all the natural enjoyments that give zest to life. The Gospel does, indeed, require some things which carnal nature does not fancy. Nor is any one more positive than this same apostle in demanding self-denial, the giving up of sin, and the mortification of the works of the flesh. But with all this, he both inculcated and exemplified a spirit of gladness and spiritual rejoicing. The things to be renounced are those only which disable, harm, and destroy, and which a right man should be glad to be rid of. Why regret to abandon lusts which war against the soul, or selfish desires which contract and harden the heart, or turbulent passions which fill the mind with disquiet and the world with disorder, or the sins and follies which sacrifice purity, degrade character, and plunge into temporal and eternal ruin? These and such like, Christians must needs surrender, and ever

fight against. But, as well might we condemn the surgeon for amputating a gangrened limb, or the physician for prescribing rigid treatment to a patient bloated with disease, as to fault and reject Christianity for insisting on the abandonment of what otherwise would surely kill and destroy both body and soul. Nor is it at all out of place to inculcate and cherish the spirit of grateful rejoicing even in combination with a season of penitence and spiritual humiliation.

What is there, then, in Christianity that should enable those who receive it to rejoice alway? And what is it so to rejoice in the Lord?

First of all, the believer has reason to rejoice alway in the great fact that a good, wise, and almighty God reigns; without whom nothing can happen, and who stands pledged to overrule everything for the best. This is the unequivocal teaching of Christianity, which no one can doubt or question and still be a proper Christian. And a wonderful source of comfort it is to all who duly take it in. It is something upon which the soul can rest in hopeful gladness, amid the worst adversities. With a living, good, ever-present, and almighty God to depend on, and knowing that He careth for us with a father's tenderness, we have an effectual bar against the inroads of despondency and despair. Fully persuaded that His gracious providence is in whatsoever comes to pass; that nothing can exceed His wisdom or escape His control; and that under His governance all things must work together for good to them

that love Him; we may, with joyous confidence, cast all our care upon Him, and say with peaceful submission and content, "It is the Lord, let Him do unto me what seemeth to Him good."

The believer also has reason for incessant rejoicing, in the divine provisions for our salvation. The worst thing in the world is sin. All the ills and evils that earth has ever known have come from sin. What a curse and damage has it brought upon our race, and upon all nature in and around us! What distresses, what alarms, what fearful apprehensions, has it brought upon the human conscience, wherever awake to the real facts! Why it has been permitted in the realm of good Almightyness, is one of those mysteries which we must leave to God to solve; but it is here, and upon every one of us, damaging our peace, and sure to sink us into endless miseries, unless met with arrest and deliverance which can only come from God.

But Heaven has commiserated our condition, and provided a ransom, and laid help upon One mighty to save and strong to deliver. There is no reason now why any one living should perish; and no true believer in Christ Jesus ever shall perish. There is no condemnation to them that have taken refuge under the cross. Are we guilty? He hath borne our sins in His own body on the tree. Have we become defiled in heart and life by the unclean thing? His blood cleanseth us from all sin. Does anything stand in the way of our eternal salvation? Christ is "made unto us

wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." And all this is abundantly availing on the easy terms of faith and loving obedience to Him who first loved us and gave himself for us. Surely, here is matter for grateful rejoicing and everlasting gladness.

Furthermore, the Christian has reason to rejoice in the fact that all his privations, disabilities, and sufferings here will soon be over forever. "The Lord is at hand." The Saviour is presently to come again,—to come "to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe," when "the dead in Christ shall rise," and "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so be ever with the Lord." The Apostles contemplated that event as impending, and liable to occur even in their day; and surely it is much nearer now. The times and seasons God has reserved in His own power; but the Saviour himself has given us command to watch and be in constant readiness for that sublime Epiphany. That promised coming of the Lord was a "blessed hope" to the early Christians. They comforted themselves with it amid their many trials. They saw in it an end to their sufferings, which they deemed as nothing compared with the glory then to be awarded. It is not hard to submit to pain if we know it will be brief and will add to our joy. Nay, we may even glory in infirmities when assured that they are to bring diviner strength and eternal benediction.

Meanwhile also the believer has ample resource in every time of need. There is a throne of grace, accessible at all times and from all places. In fact, he need never worry about anything, if only true to God and duty. Using his Christian privileges, and with grateful prayer and supplication making known his requests to God, he will not be left destitute of aught that is for his good. On this point the promises are numerous, positive, and most sacredly pledged. It matters not what the situation may be, the necessary help is within reach. And as nothing can separate the believer from the love of God, so nothing can separate him from the unfailing resources he ever has in the mercy and grace of God.

Such, then, are the contents and blessings of Christianity to every one who truly embraces it. O the vastness, the richness, the wonderfulness of the assurances, possessions, and privileges of a believer in Jesus! What more could he ask to make him happy and ever joyous!

Now, then, what is it to rejoice in the Lord? Here there is often serious mistake.

To rejoice in the Lord is not a mere spurt of aroused emotion or temporary ecstasy which clasps hands and shouts Glory! Halleluia! True, religion is nothing if it does not touch the heart and enlist the feelings; but mere emotionalism is not necessarily Christian at all. It is found associated with the vilest superstitions and with the densest ignorance of the only saving truth.

Nor is rejoicing in the Lord a self-congratu-

latory elation over one's own virtues, devotions, and attainments. The Pharisee exultantly thanked God for his personal purity and his strictness in religion; but the Saviour did not therefore consider him an approved worshipper. His rejoicing was in himself, and not "in the Lord." Of course, faith fails if it does not lead and impel to a virtuous and dutiful life; but a boastful goodness is a fearful taint to spiritual holiness.

Neither does continuous rejoicing in the Lord consist of a life so even, calm, composed, and peaceful as never to feel a sorrow, grief, anxiety, or painful disturbance. Christianity does not exempt from adverse experiences, nor lift us above the common wants, cares, and frictions of this world. Neither is it meant to make us stony and unfeeling Stoics. Quiet submissiveness even is not a grace in itself, except as conjoined with faith, zeal, and active endeavor. Every one's day has its clouds and unpleasantnesses, which often seriously affect and fret the soul. Nothing on earth is perfect, and neither is our rejoicing in the Lord. Our knowledge is imperfect; our faith is subject to trials; our surroundings are not always happy; and our duties are often hard. Even the Pauls sometimes cry, "O wretched man that I am." The surface of the sea is never perfectly at rest, and is often terribly lashed and tossed; but, deeper down, all is as calm and peaceful as the starry heavens. And so with our earthly joy in the Lord. There may be temporary and disturbing commotions on the surface;

but, deep down in the soul that has lain hold on God and His Christ, there is a calm and peaceful trust, always hopeful, always glad and joyous in the Lord, always thankful for His goodness.

What is it then to "rejoice in the Lord alway?" It is to have firm and unyielding confidence in God, firm faith in Jesus, cheerful devotion to duty, and a serene hopefulness in the sacred promises. Where there is doubt, unbelief, dejection, despondency, discontent with the dispensations of Providence, and lack of courage to do and bear for Christ's sake, there is no joy in the Lord. When Christian duty is a burden, and indifference takes the place of diligence, and carnal ease is consulted, rather than the will and requirements of God, there is no proper joy in the Lord. When people shrink from the confession of Christ, refuse place in the Church of Christ, and are more captivated and controlled by the ways, vanities, gains, pleasures, and pursuits of the world than by the love and calls and promises of Christ, their joy in Him is fatally weak.

A reasonable enjoyment of the good things of this world is not inimical to joy in the Lord; for they are all from Him, meant for the comfort of His people, and to be received and appropriated with thanksgiving. Diligence in business, cheerful mingling with society, and the honest filling of places and relations in the social economy, need not hinder our joy in the Lord; for they are parts of the service ordained for human welfare and the divine glory. Joy in God carries with it

the honoring of all that is of God, as Christ himself has set us the example. And, when the heart is right, there may be this joy even amid cares and sufferings.

Our Maker means us to be happy,—happy in Him,—happy in His service,—happy in the lot providence has assigned us,—happy in every duty thereby imposed. For this He has made us, and redeemed us, and given us the directory of His Word and the gifts and guidance of His Spirit. There is a giddy mirth which is like “the crackling of thorns under a pot,” blazing, noisy, and soon expiring in smoke and darkness. There is a reckless and boisterous hilarity of life which takes delight in ignoring God and outraging the dignified solemnity of our being; but it is short-lived, and as melancholy in its end as it is silly in character and contemptuous of the cries of man’s better nature. Of such abnormity and folly God and reason would have us beware; for there is no true nor lasting happiness in the paradise of fools.

Hear, then, the conclusion of the whole matter: “Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exerciseth loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”

The Glad Nativity.

Christmas.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared.—
TITUS 2 : 11.



THE seasons in their round have brought us once more to our annual Christmas celebration. It is a glad festival, welcomed by all. It comes in the darkest part of the year, when the days are shortest, nature deadest, and the season roughest; but it comes to create for us a garden of delight amid the drear and bleakness. It comes to cheer our homes, brighten friendships, transfigure childhood with angelic mirth, and make the old feel young again. It kindles new life and stir in the world, and fills our sanctuaries with grateful Halleluias.

What, then, is the real meaning of Christmas? On what is its gladness founded? We read the answer in the text: "*The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared.*"

We stand by a manger in Bethlehem. In that manger lies a newborn babe, helpless, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and needing the service of friendly hands. But what is there remarkable or strange in that? Let us see. From heaven

comes word that this is no ordinary child. Born in time, He is yet said to be from old, from everlasting. Sacred messengers proclaim Him "the Son of the Highest." And the Eternal Father, bringing His first-begotten into the world, saith, "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

We look, and listen, and hear, and wonder. Indeed, we are in the presence of the greatest miracle of time. Here is Deity in lowly infancy. Here is Divinity with our human nature taken into personal unity with himself. Here is one, "who, being in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, laid aside the show of Deity, took the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Here is divine immensity in a little human body; omnipotence in infant weakness; the adored of angels in the condition of a weeping child; the Lord of glory born of a woman, and lodged in a cattle-cave! O the mystery, the impenetrable mystery of the Incarnation! Verily "Great is the mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh." Our eyes are dazzled and blinded as we attempt to look into it. But the wonderful fact is there, and nothing can overthrow it. All history attests it. Our glorious Christianity sinks into empty flatness without it. Unbelief may scoff, and seek to explain away the miracle; but, with all that has been said, or can be said, the only consistent solution is that which the orthodox Church holds and confesses. That Babe is very God incarnate.

What if it does transcend all scientific explana-

tion? What if the depths of it are too great for human intelligence to fathom? It is the same in other things. What in all the universe do we understand? And "a religion without its mysteries is like a temple without its God." We can know the fact, and that is enough to explain everything a hundredfold better than any skeptical theorizing man has ever broached.

And why doubt or reject it because we cannot explain it? If we are not to believe or act on anything until we perfectly understand it, we must unmake ourselves, and life becomes an impossibility. But, God be praised, it is not necessary for us to understand either the biology, the physiology, or the metaphysics of our Saviour's Incarnation. Joseph and Mary did not understand it. The shepherds who heard the angels sing over it did not understand it. The wise men who read the story of it in the stars did not understand it. But that did not hinder their believing and grateful joy in it. We believe a thousand other things that we cannot understand. Millions believe and know the worth and warmth of the sunlight, who are utterly at a loss to comprehend or explain it. The mystery of it is no barrier to their joy in it. And whether we understand or not *how* the eternal Son of God could become one with humanity in the condition of a babe, the wonderful fact stands revealed, and that is sufficient. Christian faith grasps it and rejoices in it; for therein it finds the grace of God that bringeth salvation.

This grace was once a mere promise,—only a

word,—which the ancient Church received, believed, and was jubilant in hope of Him who was to come. Christmas Day changed that grace of word and promise into the grace of living fulfilment,—and shows it outwardly embodied in human flesh and blood. The promise has culminated in a birth. Divine provision to save a fallen world hath “*appeared.*” We see it in this manger at Bethlehem. We find it written, and we now behold it *born*,—born to grow, and mature, and act, till sin is cancelled, and the Kingdom of Heaven opened to all believers. Here is grace that has stirred the hearts and songs of angels,—even Divinity personally conjoined with humanity, and man’s nature made one with the divine, to redeem us from the curse and condemnation of sin.

Is it asked whether this was necessary? Judging from what the Scriptures say and the nature of the case, the answer must be Yes; it was necessary. The Redeemer had to be a man to fulfill the law in the nature that sinned, and to be able to sympathize with those whom He came to redeem. But He had to be more than a man in order to satisfy the law and meet its penalty so as to avail for others. Nay, He had to be divine to have power to lay down His life, and then to take it again. And as God cannot suffer, nor man meet all the violated law’s demands, so the divine had to take our nature, and through personal oneness with the human to bring redemption. Hence the Son of God, the very outbeaming of the

Father's glory, to purge our sins, took not on Him the nature of angels, but took on Him the seed of Abraham, sharing with us our common humanity, sin only excepted. Yes, it behooved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, make reconciliation for the sins of the people, destroy him who had the power of death, and deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. And this wonderful, indispensable, and unsearchable union of Deity in humanity, inseparable for ever in the Person of our adorable Lord and Saviour, is what this day brings before us in that manger-cradled Child.

This, then, is what Christmas means. And now, how should we be influenced and affected by it? How keep and celebrate it? How mark the anniversary of the appearance of that astounding grace of God that bringeth salvation?

Let us not heathenize it with the absurd fiction of "Santa Claus." That is a trick of Satan to betray Christians into idolatry. Children will soon find out the cheat, and so learn from parental example to lie and deceive. And why put the long dead St. Nicholas in the place of the ever-living Christ-child—the *Christ-kindlein* of our pious Saxon fathers,—the Christ-child, to whom Christmas owes its existence, and from whom come all Christmas gifts and joys, as every other good that is in the world. Make the young ones happy with your joyous surprises; but let them

know it is all from the blessed Christ, and not from a mythic saint, or a fictitious and preposterous thing that does not, and never did, exist.

Christmas, as its name expresses, is a *Christian* festival, and should be pervaded with the Christian spirit. It calls for joy indeed, but not for heathenish fantastics and lies. Let homes and friends be merry. Let there be light and cheer for every one. Good-willing is the spirit of the occasion. Let gifts and blessings flow in streams to gladden life and refresh and lift the soul. Let music swell, at least the music of the heart. Let every dwelling put on a goodliness to image a new Eden. All this is due and fitting. But let it not be forgotten that it is the birthday of the Christ, who is the spring and reason of it all.

There is much merriment and rejoicing at Christmas time without thought or care for Him whose Nativity it commemorates. It is with many as with the crowd following a procession. They move with it; they are excited over it; they wildly cheer as it passes; but they are no part of it. The meaning of the thing they do not realize nor consider. In the true joy of it they have no share. They sing, and shout, and are boisterous and liberal enough in their rejoicing. They are even more gay, and loud in their merry-making than those who are deepest in it. Like Saul when he heard the singing of the prophets, they sing and dance most violently of all, but without the genuine inspiration. There is no right Christmas where there is no reference

to the babe of Bethlehem, no appreciation of the grace of God in sending us so great and wonderful a Saviour, no heart-gratitude for the coming of the Christ.


There is in Bethlehem an old church edifice which roofs over the grotto in which it is believed Jesus was born. A large silver star lies on the spot, and over it hang golden lamps, kept always burning. These tell of The Bright and Morning Star and the never-dying golden light that issued from that dark place. Deeply impressive is the scene. I have seen even rough men drop upon their knees before it to give glory to God for what there came into the world. And to that spot our Christmas brings us to-day. Where the Shepherds knelt in lowly adoration around that babe, there in spirit we would kneel, and for like purpose. Cherishing in our hearts the sweet picture of that sweetest, purest, holiest, divinest Child that ever appeared on earth, we know what has come of Him; what grace of God came with Him; what a work He has done for perishing humanity; what a Kingdom of salvation He has set up; what glory and dominion He hath with the Father; what loving sympathy He feels for those who believe on Him; what a blessed heaven He is providing for us after we are done with this world; how He condescends to hear our prayers, and feed and nourish us by His word and sacraments; and we would forfeit all claims to reason and righteous sensibility, not to rejoice in reverent thankfulness for His Nativity.

A precious Sacrament He has also left us by which to remember Him. In this He proposes to have us commune with Him in His glory, and to seal unto us all the fruits of His merciful achievements. To this, then, let us come with glad and joyous attestation of our faith in Him, as the acme and crown of our Christmas Festival, and as our highest earthly converse with Him who was born at Bethlehem, crucified on Calvary, and is alive for ever to fill the world with His glory.

The Gracious Errand.

Sunday after Christmas.

For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.—LUKE 19 : 10.

HE Christian world is still aglow with the glad celebration of our Saviour's birth. In the text we have His own naming of himself, and of the purpose of His coming.

You will notice that He does not say, *I am come*, although He means himself. His language is, "*The Son of Man is come.*" This is the formula in which He often designated himself, and not without important significance.

It is not intended as a denial of His divine Sonship. He all the while assumed and marvelously demonstrated that He was truly the Son of God. Peter confessed Him as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God," and He answered to it with commendation and blessing, as the very truth on which His Church was to be built. But the great wonder in His case was, not that the Son of God should concern himself in human affairs, but that He should have taken on Him man's nature, to become a real member of our

race. This, however, was a necessity in order to be to us an effectual Saviour; and hence His carefulness to impress and emphasize the wondrous fact, that, though the very Son of God, He was, and ever will be, as truly and unchangeable "*the Son of Man.*"

This way of emphasizing his human Sonship implied that He had none of the limitations, narrownesses, or imperfections that mark other men. He was not the Son of a section, or of a particular age, country, or class; but the Son of *man*, as if the whole human race had come to its highest bloom in Him. He was a Jew by birth, but with nothing of Jewish peculiarities or prejudices to separate Him from the rest of mankind. He was cosmopolitan in all the elements and make up of His character. Everything truest and best in every man, and everything tenderest and purest in every woman, was summed up in Him, making of Him, as a man, the very flower of all humanity.

The same also emphasized His nearness to us. As the Son of Man, He is the relative and brother of every member of our race—bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He is therefore capable of being "touched with the feeling of our infirmity;" and, being "tempted in all points like as we are," He is the better able to "succor them that are tempted." And one of the greatest of consolations that Christians have, is, that God hath sent us a Saviour who has a brother's heart, as well as an almighty arm.

As a man He can sympathize with us in all our weaknesses and trials; and as the Son of *man*, and not of a sect or party, His sympathies are as wide ranging as the race itself, embracing Samaritans as well as Jews, Roman soldiers as well as honored scribes, the Magdalenes as well as the sisters of Bethany, the fishermen of Galilee as well as the priests of Jerusalem, the Zaccheuses and Levis as well as the Peters and Johns, children and menials and lepers and sinners and malefactors as well as the greatest and worthiest of mankind. He is "the Son of *man*;" therefore, wherever beats a human pulse, or a heart that sighs for deliverance, there He is with a true brother's love and tenderness.

All this is certainly included in His description of himself as the Son of Man."

Notice now His account of the purpose for which He came into the world,—"*The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*"

Men act from different impulses and aims in life: some to better their condition, to augment their fortunes, to gratify their lusts and fancies; some for glory, to win applause, to make themselves a name; and some to help the poor and helpless, to maintain right, to deliver the suffering and oppressed, and to promote the enlightenment and general good of their fellow-men. But that which moved the Son of God to take our humanity upon Him, and to become the Son of Man, was, "*to seek and to save that which was lost.*"

Some years ago, a man was at work amid a lot of strange bones that had been dug up out of the earth. No one knew to what sort of a creature they belonged, and few cared to know. But the man was familiar with comparative anatomy, and was thus enabled to bring those strange old fragments together in place, and to fill out what was wanting by what was necessarily implied. And when he had done his work, there stood forth a wondrous form of being, as it lived and moved a hundred ages in the past. And so, when the Son of Man came, the world had become a general wreck. Humanity, as depicted in Ezekiel's vision, had become a valley of dry bones. And to gather up and reconstruct these damaged remains to something of their primeval type, to breathe life into them, and to restore man to his original God-likeness and glory, was the purpose for which the blessed Saviour came. "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

The man of science, at work with his old bones, could do no more than recover a dead form of the past, which would always remain dead. He could not put life into it. But the office of the Son of Man is to give life, to quicken dead souls, to shape them into saints, and to endow them with a blessed immortality.

And by very simple means does He accomplish this. Having purchased redemption by His cross, by His word, providence and Spirit, He now seeks out the sinful, the sorrowing and the lost,

offers His free forgiveness to the contrite and penitent, and breathes into them the life of faith, hope, and charity. By a principle of love which never wanes, by a human sympathy which never tires, and with a plenitude of renewing power which never exhausts, He comes to every lost and anguished soul, offering to assuage its misery, to lift it out of its distresses, and to set it on the path of eternal salvation, on the simple terms of His Gospel. His mission, as named by himself, is, to comfort them that mourn, to bind up the broken-hearted, to speak peace to the downcast and troubled, to mollify the sorrows of the afflicted, and to give hope and happiness to those ready to perish; for He is come "to seek and to save that which was lost."

And what, dear friends, are *we*, without Him, but damaged, helpless, and lost men and women? Even in the vast favors amid which we have been reared, and our instruction in the things of Christ and salvation, we can scarcely look at ourselves and think of the judgment without trembling and fear, or call ourselves to strict account without realizing how utterly hopeless our case is without the gracious forgiveness to be found alone in Jesus. But the Son of Man is come for our help. Sinful and unclean, He is here for our relief and cleansing. Poor and friendless, He is here to sympathize with us, and to speak words of consolation to our souls. Homes darkened with sorrow, He is here to illuminate and cheer.

Slavery to sin and vice, He is here to break and to strengthen the released for abiding deliverance. With death and the grave before us, He is here to sustain in the mysterious voyage, and to make a dying bed feel soft as downy pillows are. And whatever else there may be to weigh us down, or to make us despair, He is here to modify and banish it, and to bless with the joys of an everlasting salvation. For "the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

And to assure and certify this to us all the more tangibly and individually, He has instituted the Holy Sacrament of His Supper, in which He gives to each His Body and His Blood, broken and shed for us and for many for the remission of sins; that, as we take and eat, and take and drink, we have from Him the personal pledge of the redemption which He is come to fulfill to every believer. For whoso eateth of this bread, and drinketh of this cup, firmly believing the words of Christ, and resting devoutly upon Him, dwelleth in Christ, and Christ in Him, and hath eternal life.

He was the Word that spake it;
He took the bread and brake it;
And what that Word did make it,
Let us believe and take it.

A Noble Testimony.

Epiphany.

Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.—MATT. 2 : 1, 2.



THE Festival of the Epiphany, although one of the oldest and most significant of our Church Festivals, is, for the most part, indifferently observed. The facts which it celebrates are certainly remarkable, and instructive enough to deserve our earnest attention.

At the place which Micah had named, at the time which Daniel had indicated, and in the wonderful manner which Isaiah had described, the great Messiah was born. An angel had announced the fact to the humble shepherds in the vicinity, and the heavenly hosts had sung their "Glory in Excelsis" over it. Those who witnessed these wonderful demonstrations, had hastened to see what had come to pass, and were publishing abroad what had been told them from heaven concerning this manger-cradled Child.

A grand and glorious Epiphany had thus been made; but it was confined to Judea and the Jews.

The text refers to another, no less marvellous, touching the same facts, outside of the race and lands of Israel. While to Jacob's seed pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; and from them as concerning the flesh came the Christ, blessed for ever; the Gentile world had not been forgotten, nor left without demonstrations of the advent of a Saviour for all men. Far-off saintly sages were made aware of the fact, and came to worship Him, and laid their costly offerings at His infant feet. The manifestations in Judea were to be expected, as the promises were to the children of Israel; but these manifestations among the far-away ethnic peoples are the more to be wondered at and admired.

It is a great mistake, however, to think the whole race outside of the chosen people had been delivered over to the evil one, and that all were alike without God and without hope in the world. We must not forget Job, and Melchisedec, and Jethro, and Balaam before his fall, and other men of faith in God of whom we read in the sacred Word. And so, at the time Christ was born, there still were some noble souls who clung to the primeval promise of the Seed of the woman, and read of Him in the heavenly Constellations, and found among the stars the signs and tokens that He had come.

Just who these people were has not been told us. That they were Gentiles, the Church as-

sumes and nearly all interpreters maintain. That they were from the far east from Palestine, is clearly asserted in the record; but whether from Chaldea, or Persia, or Bactria, or Arabia, cannot be determined by present knowledge of the subject. That they were Kings, and that their number was three, as some have assumed, the Scriptures do not say. That they were distinguished men, rich men, and men of high degree in the communities in which they lived, is certainly implied. That they were "wise men,"—men skilled in the best learning of their time and country—is abundantly indicated. The ancient Magi were a learned priestly order, mostly occupied with matters of religion, astronomy, and the sacred sciences. They were the teachers of kings and people in divine wisdom. Daniel in his day was the president of their guild in Babylon; and from among them Cyrus choose his priests for Persia. Their theology was the noblest and purest then extant in the ethnic world. And to this order, Matthew tells us, these men from the sun-rising belonged.

They came to Jerusalem, showing a very definite knowledge and a very assured faith with regard to the birth and character of the Christ. They contemplated Him, even in His cradle, as a great worshipful Being, by birth a Jewish Prince, but one whom it was their devout desire to see, and their religious duty to greet with humble adoration.

Whence they obtained such clear and definite

knowledge, has been the subject of much learned and unsatisfactory conjecture. The alleged widespread expectation of a great triumphing Prince then about to appear, cannot explain it. Fragments of Hebrew prophecies that may have floated down among the Gentiles from the times of the Jewish Captivity in Babylon, cannot explain it; for these Magi knew more about the matter than the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees. A special revelation for the occasion, without further record, is so unlike what we know of God's methods, and so improbable, that there is no adequate warrant to suppose it. The appearance of a new light in the heavens, a comet, a meteor, a sort of Will-o'-the-wisp to go before them and lead the way, cannot explain it, without something more to tell them that it referred to the birth of an adorable Prince in Judea, and that it was their duty and interest to follow it. They speak of having "seen His star in the east;" but that must needs have been contemplated in connection with a further record or system containing the full story of the virgin-born Redeemer.

Such a starry record we now know did exist, and exists to this day, in the forty-eight Constellations of the Primeval Astronomy, in which the whole story of the Serpent and the Cross was hung upon the stars from the beginning. In the Zodiac, with its Decans,—in what Herschel called "those uncouth figures and outlines of men and monsters usually scribbled over celestial globes and maps,"—the French atheists traced the main features

and hopes of Christianity, thinking thus to prove our Gospel a mere copy from these old Constellations. Those who attempted to reply to their presentations, on examination were obliged to confess that the picture of the Son of the Virgin, including His conflicts, work, and final triumph, is there in very vivid outline. And there it certainly is. It is a sublime truth, which needs vastly more attention than it receives, that the Primeval Astronomy was Evangelic Prophecy,—the faith and hopes of the early Patriarchs, by inspiration of God, written on the face of the sky, symbolizing with startling clearness the Christ, in His whole character and work hitherto, and in what He is yet to achieve for our afflicted world.

The Magi were special priest-astronomers,—devout students of these sky-records; and thence it was that they, for the most part at least, obtained their knowledge and certifications concerning Him whom they came so far to find. The Psalmist says, "The heavens declare the glory of God," not only His wisdom, power, and handiwork, but much more His moral attributes and exhibits. The chief glory of God is Christ, who is "the image and glory of God;" nay, "the brightness"—the very outbeaming—"of His glory." There can be no declaring of God's full and proper "glory" which does not take in Christ, and the story of redemption through Him. As the heavens, then, "declare the glory of God," the story of Christ and redemption must somehow be recorded there. And there it is, in speak-

ing Constellations, arranged by inspired believers before the flood, and furnishing a record which may still be read.¹

And from the "signs" and Constellations noted in the Primeval Astronomy, and the legends and traditions connected with them, these "wise men" had their knowledge of the promised Seed of the woman. That was their Bible—the text-book of their faith and hope. Nor are we at a loss to understand how they read from it what they did.

By three successive conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn in the same year, they knew, according to the traditional significance of conjunctions of these planets, that a birth of unprecedented character and importance was about to occur, or had just occurred. By a new and very brilliant star then shining in the Constellation of *Coma*, the Constellation of the desired One, and located in the head of that Infant, hence called "*His star*," they knew that the birth indicated was the birth of "the Desire of nations," even the great Prince that was to come. And by all three of these significant and very rare conjunctions, in the Constellation of the Fishes, which was the Constellation traditionally assigned to God's chosen people, and so to the Jews, they knew that this marvellous Prince was born in Judea—"born King of the Jews." And so, by the impulses of the Spirit, which always attend the devout study of the truth, these "wise men" were moved to make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to find the miracu-

¹ See my *Gospel in the Stars*.

lous Child, and to pay to Him their adoring homage.

An admirable record did these ethnic sages thus make for themselves. Some hold that ignorance is the mother of devotion; but here were men, among the most learned of their time, whose science served to bring them to a knowledge and recognition of the Christ. A little learning is often "a dangerous thing;" but depth and honest thoroughness is sure to lead the soul to God, without whom nothing can be intelligently construed. These men wisely directed their studies toward spiritual ends; and they reached clear convictions, on which they were willing and ready to act, and did act, without regard to cost or inconvenience. In this respect they greatly shame and rebuke the materialism of our day, which ignores what concerns the soul, and most favors conclusions that would dethrone the Deity, and destroy the centre of the world's sublimest hopes by reducing the divine Christ to a myth, or a being like ourselves. Their opportunities for learning and knowing the truth were far more limited and difficult than those of the Jews of their day, or than those of the people now living; and yet they learned it better, and sacrificed a thousand-fold more for it, than the loud professors in Jerusalem, or the great body of so-called Christians in our day. When they knew where to find Christ, no distance, expense, or difficulties could hinder them from making their way to Him; while many who have Him continually preached

to them as a present and almighty Saviour, ready, waiting, and entreating to become their salvation, only turn a deaf ear, and never stir a step to come to Him!

Very marked and cheering also is the testimony which these distinguished sages gave to the Saviour in whom we trust. They came "to worship Him." They found a newborn babe, surrounded with extreme lowliness and poverty; but that did not stagger them. When they saw Him, they "*fell down, and worshipped Him,*" and presented Him treasures, as to the worthiest and most honorable of kings.

It is useless to say that this was only an expression of ordinary civility. Men so great would not travel so far, at cost so heavy, to an insignificant foreign country, to pay common compliments to a babe in rags, of whom the king knew nothing. Such a view of the case is simply absurd. In the Constellations from which they had their knowledge, Christ appears as the Son of a virgin, the Desire of nations, the Man of double nature on the Cross, the revived and exalted Shepherd and Harvester, the Vanquisher in the conflict with evil, the triumphing Hero, the Upholder of His people, the Binder of Satan, the invincible Ruler, the great Deliverer, the Captain of Salvation. And so it was that they conceived of Him when they came inquiring, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" In such a view their "worship" could not have been a mere civil obeisance. And the character of it, in men so

great and high, and rendered to a babe in His condition, had quite another significance. It was sacred homage, and nothing less. It was the devout bowing of their souls in recognition of a Divine Saviour. It was an acknowledgment of their assured belief that the hope of the world lay in that swaddled Infant. In it we read a sublime confirmation of our Christian faith. These men had found the truth as we hold it, and they were consistent and true in confessing it by lowly homage and royal gifts.

And a very worthy example did these "wise men" set for our imitation. Their profoundest interest and anxiety had reference to the Christ, the long-promised Seed of the Virgin. They studied and searched for information concerning Him, as the worthiest subject of all human investigation. Has this been our case? Have we concerned ourselves to reach clear and settled understanding as to who and what Jesus is, and what is due Him from us?

Nor was their faith in this newborn Saviour and King a mere dead and inert intellectual persuasion. It stirred their hearts. It awakened their activities. It fashioned their purposes. It directed and controlled their lives. It moved them to great and costly exertions to come to Him as soon as they learned that He was within their reach. Has our learning of Him effected the same in us? What movement have we made to come to Him? What appreciation have we shown of our superior privileges in this regard?

What sacrifices of ease and convenience have we made to behold, acknowledge, and honor Him as our Lord and King?

These men worshipped Him even in His cradle. Is He the object of our sacred adoration? Do we look upon Him as our Lord, our Hope, our Saviour, even the incarnate God, after all the demonstrations He has given? How do these Gentiles shame the abounding unbelief of our time!

These people gave their hearts, and with them much of their richest possessions. This material help was needed to assist in the flight to avoid the murderous designs of the bloody-handed Herod; and the Saviour's cause is always in need of the liberal and substantial gifts of His worshippers, as much to prove their sincerity, as to further His triumphs. True faith means gifts and sacrifices. With the believing soul must go the generous hand, of which these Magians give us the proper illustration. Nor is it possible ever to do too much for Him who has done so much for us.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

And where genuine devotion reigns, God's favors are sure to be shown; and holy intimations will come to direct us in our journey home.

The Offended Nazarenes.

First Sunday after Epiphany.

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him.—MARK 6: 3.



FROM this it appears that our Saviour was a mechanic, a carpenter; and that He followed this trade up to the time of His public ministry. Though the family was of royal descent, the vicissitudes of the Jewish people had greatly reduced it; and honest labor was accepted in preference to trying to maintain a wasted nobility in proud idleness and rags.

It was a wise inculcation of the ancient rabbis, that every Jew should have some sort of trade. The saying was, that a parent who did not teach his son a trade, put him in training to become a thief. It would also be greatly better for the community, and give a more hopeful outlook for society, if greater weight were attached to this among us. High schools may be good things; but when they come in the way of the training of our young people to earn an honest living, they had better not be. Saul of Tarsus, though one of the best educated young men of his day,

had to learn to weave tent-cloth and make tents, which came good to him even in his great work as an Apostle of Christ.

It is no disgrace to be a mechanic. Skill in any useful art or handicraft is just as honorable as skill in any other department, and may effectually help out where what is thought more dignified is of little or no account. People of wealth and blood, who boast their high estate, only prove their lack of sense by sneering at tradesmen and laborers. To be a competent shoemaker, tailor, baker, or bricklayer, is far worthier in all right valuation, than to be a genteel dog-fancier or simpering dude. Bishop Sanderson was not wrong when he said that idle gentlemen, the same as tramps and beggars, are the plague and scandal of a nation. If God himself were to come down into our world, to live here as a true man, He would choose some useful trade or occupation, and would attend faithfully to its duties. Yea, verily; for He did thus come in Jesus Christ, and Jesus was a carpenter, a builder and repairer of houses, and a maker of plows and yokes. And it is particularly unbecoming in those who profess His Name to be ashamed of work, or to look with contempt upon craftsmen and operatives, as if they were a class of inferior beings. A thousand-fold more honorable is it for people to be occupied in honest toil, than to be idle vagabonds, and lounging do-nothings, living on the labor of others, or improvident spendthrifts frittering away their substance in extravagance and folly, paying

their debts by bankrupt acts, depending as pensioners on their friends, and perhaps ending their lives in State prisons. The Lord of all was a carpenter; and it detracted nothing from His heavenly dignity, and wrought no detriment to His greatness.

It also appears from the text that the holiest lives, to outward view, may be much the same as others. Life has its daily rounds of work and rest, duties and necessities, for the pious the same as for every one else. For thirty years Jesus lived and wrought in and around Nazareth, without showing any specially marked difference from others of His age; and yet He was the purest and holiest man that ever lived, and really the Lord of all.

It is altogether a mistake to suppose that piety means eccentricity, or is made up of certain extraordinary demonstrations. True religion does not require the carrying of a label on one's back to keep the world advised of it. People can be as good and holy in the ordinary paths of common life and duty, as in showy acts and manners which draw upon them public notice and attention. The Gospel calls us to be Christians, and the cheerful and honest discharge of the duties of our lot and situation belongs to proper Christianity. And no one is the holier, or the better off for heaven, for being a nun or an anchorite.

We cannot say that all states and conditions of life are equally favorable to piety. There are situations in which it is hard to maintain a good

conscience. But, if one cannot be true and faithful to God and right in the place or business in which he is, he must get out of it; for a man had better starve and die than sell his soul for a little earthly gain. The Lord always has a way for his Daniels, Shadrachs, Meschacks, and Abednegos to maintain their souls untarnished even in the midst of a world of idolaters; and in most cases people can serve God quite as well by fidelity to the common duties of their lot, as by trying to make a providence of their own. The great matter in any case is, to have faith in God, and to make sure of being on terms with Him, content to serve Him in such spheres and duties as have fallen to us, however trying or humble, till it may please Him to transfer us to other fields.

But it further appears from the text that prejudices and prepossessions are often great hindrances to salvation. These people were familiar with Jesus as an ordinary working-man, and one of themselves, and they could not bear the thought of His being the great Messiah when He began to assert His claims. They knew Him to be virtuous, industrious, kindhearted, truthful, and exemplary, and had heard Him read and preach with such clearness, power, and unction, "that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this that is given unto Him?" They had never known Him to be fanatical, or given to extravagance, egotism, or insanity. They knew of His wonderful works. And they had every reason to believe

that He would not claim to be what He was not. Yet "*they were offended at Him,*" so much so that they even sought to kill Him. The trouble was that their prejudices got the better of their reason and good sense. They were looking for the Messiah to come as a great and mighty Cæsar, to break the Roman yoke and make them the masters and possessors of the earth; and hence they could not brook the idea that one from among themselves, belonging to so ordinary a rank of life, could be the sublime King and Redeemer of the world. It so crossed their ways of thinking, and so offended their prejudices, that it stirred up their resentful passions, and caused them to reject and seek to destroy the true and only Saviour. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

And so it is even to this present. Nothing is more adverse to faith and salvation than the inveterate prejudices and prepossessions of those to whom the Gospel comes. It is not that Christ fails adequately to commend himself to their confidence and acceptance. It is not that eternal life has not been brought near to them, even to the doors of their dwellings. The only trouble is that it comes in a way that does not suit their fancy. It does not come with pomp and circumstance to captivate their carnal likes. It does not fit their notions. It conflicts with their estimates, tastes, and ideas. It demands admissions and concessions against themselves which do not flatter their self-consequence. There is too much

of the carpenter, and the common,—too much humiliation of human pride,—too much bringing down of vain conceits,—to be relished by them ; and so Christ is rejected, the mighty work He would do for them is repelled, grace is refused, and salvation retires, leaving them to their ill judgments and unpardoned sins.

Dear friends, it is a bad thing to set up our dreams and fancies against the claims of Jesus. Whether He comes as we would prescribe and prejudge, or in ways quite different from our likes and expectations, He comes with ample proofs and tokens that He is all that He claims and professes ; and it is our interest and duty to receive and welcome Him. His Christhood is not to be determined by the humbleness of His birth, or the rank of His schooling and trade, or the ordinary character of His relatives. Some of the world's greatest benefactors arose from very low estates.

Neither can we be justified in thinking meanly of His Church because of the unattractiveness of its members, or the sacrifices to be made in accepting place in it. There is after all a superior glory in it beyond anything this world can offer. Though Christ was a carpenter, He was also the architect of the world, and its all-sufficient Redeemer. And it was part of His glory that, being in the form of God, and thinking it no robbery or wrongful assumption to be equal with God, He condescended to partake of our common life and

lot, to be to us a Saviour, to whom we can look and feel as toward a brother. And to let our worldly temper turn us away from Him because He was a carpenter and lived among men as other men, is the height of unwisdom ; for its effect is to deprive us of the most precious opportunities that ever came to needy mortals,—to sacrifice our salvation to our own petty notions,—to repeat the folly of these offended Nazarenes.

And equally at fault are they who plead the lowliness of their own station, trades, or occupation, as an excuse for neglecting Christ and their souls. Jesus earned His living and supported His mother by serving as a carpenter, and it was no hindrance to His maintenance of a holy life. With His service at the bench He could still fulfill every duty to God and every precept of the law. No one is so disabled by his situation that he cannot also at the same time successfully attend to his spiritual wants. No demands of worldly business can justify or excuse impiety or neglect of God. Business men, and laboring men, and every sort of men, can also be Christian men, if so minded, without any detriment to legitimate earthly interests ; and they live beneath their privileges and their duty if they are not Christians. People may follow their daily avocations and still serve God acceptably. Jesus did it, and worked as a carpenter at the same time that He “increased in wisdom and in favor with God and man.” Even trade, and labor, and common duty, belong to the service of God, if

undertaken in a right spirit, for a right end, and with proper reference to the divine will and favor. Therefore, let no one say that he is too low down in life, too much driven, too busy, too much constrained by his situation, to serve his Maker; for such is not the truth.

Consider, then, dear friends, how the blessed Saviour comes to *us*, and what example He hath set us of humble, honest, and godly living. Think upon your manner of life, and to what extent your hearts and energies are conditioned to His gracious proposals. Many, alas, are repeating the conduct of these unbelieving Nazarenes. To many He is nothing but a carpenter, the brother of James, and Joses, and Juda, and Simon, beyond which they have no further use for Him. Though impressed by the grandeur of His teachings and the wonderfulness of His works, they are "offended at him" when He demands their confidence and their hearts. Many rail at His Gospel, and only despise those who believe and obey it. Yea, great is the company of those who disdain serious attention to the calls and claims of Jesus.

O, ye people of unfaith, give ear, and consider your ways. You have much to question and object respecting this Jesus of Nazareth; but in whom will you find a better? You have little or no regard for His Church; but where else will you get such a salvation as it holds forth, proclaims, and effects? You object to the doctrines it teaches and the demands it makes; but by what

other faith or conditions can you count on acceptance in the judgment and a blessed eternity? You sometimes dream of a better world; but how will you ever reach it, while putting aside Him who alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life? You deem yourselves exempt because of your station or disabling surroundings; your poverty, your daily labors, your unfavorable associations; but, if Christ could live a perfect life as a poor carpenter for all those years in Nazareth, without interference with His business, how can you be justified in neglecting your soul for any such reasons as you allege?

Be not deceived, dear friends. If you are still among the unbelieving and unsaved, the trouble is not that you cannot do better, but that you *will* not. The Christ is here, teaching, and preaching, and proposing himself as the anointed Saviour; and His own word is, "Blessed is he that shall not be offended in Me." Why, then, give preference to your own erring fancies, and let the great salvation go? O the unwisdom of the unbelieving!

The Light of the World.

Second Sunday after Epiphany.

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.—JNO. 8: 12.



THE Scriptures tell us that there was once a time, when this world, now so full of beauty, order, and pleasantness, was but a huge mass of confused matter, wrapped in impenetrable darkness. It had no form, no order, no beauty. It was chaos. But a home for immortal beings was to be constructed out of it. It was to become a garden of God. It was to be filled with the children of joy and happiness. Its deformity was to be reduced to form, its disorder melted into shape, its darkness transformed into light, its death brought into life. And for this the Almighty spoke, and the grandest of gifts was the result. Darkness heard, and vanished. Death heard, and hasted away. Disorder heard, and began to shine with beauty. "God said, *Let there be light, and there was light.*"

Humanity, like the world in its rudimental ugliness and disorder, needed a like putting forth upon it of Almighty power. All its order was

disorder; all its harmony, disharmony; all its light, darkness; all its life, death. If anything blessed was ever to come of it; if that moral chaos was ever to be lit with order, beauty, and good; there needed to be another going forth of God's potent word,—another "*Let there be light,*" to effect it. And that new word for this new creation is "THE WORD" which was made flesh, and dwelt among men, whose glory men saw, and whose blessed life our souls have felt. As light is the utterance of God in the natural world, so is Christ in the sphere of the spiritual.

The purest and most untarnishable thing in the world is light. Snow is pure, ice is pure, water is pure, air is pure; but either of them will admit of defilement, and may be marred, polluted, and made the instrument of pollution. It is not so with light. Man's hand cannot soil it. No corruption can infect it, or cleave to it. Nothing can defile its rays, or attach pollution to its beams. And such is Christ. All creatures have shown themselves liable to sin and moral taint; but Christ passed through a world of sin, and the hell of its punishment, as a sunbeam through a lazaret, and came forth as pure and blessed as He sprang from God himself. He took on him sin's form, that He might endure sin's due; but its stain He never knew. In Bethlehem's manger He was the Holy Child; and to heaven He returned the spotless Lamb of God. He lived a human life, tried by all its cares and sorrows, oppressed with all its necessities and temptations,

grew up among its corrupt children, associated with its erring population, encountered its subtle passions, suffered its coarseness, its rebuffs, and its villainies, and died a martyr to His efforts to reform its defections; but in all this "*He did no sin*, neither was guile found in His mouth." He was pure, for He is Light.

Light is also as bright as it is pure. Things are bright in proportion as they are full of light. The day is bright when no clouds shut out the sun. The prospect is bright when illumined by the greatest number of rays. The hope is bright which is freest from gloomy forebodings and fullest of the light of promise. And such is Christ. He is brightness,—“The brightness of the Father’s glory.” The brightness of every Divine perfection. And His office is to dispense light. That is the brightest time in the soul when there is most of Christ in it. That is the brightest page on which most of Christ is found. That is the brightest sermon in which most of Christ is heard. That is the brightest life in which most of Christ is seen. That is the brightest world in which Christ is most fully received. And that heart, that church, that world, is but lead and darkness where Christ is not.

Light likewise is free. It comes without cost, and it comes ungrudgingly. Though the first dawn of day be feeble, its first rays dim, and its first presence seen only upon the highest summits; those beams increase in distinctness; the ruddy glow deepens into crimson and gold; and pres-

ently the heavens are aglow with its brightness, and the earth is flooded with its splendors. No poverty is so great as to debar from its blessings. It gilds the halls of the great and the huts of the humble, and all alike without money and without price. Nor is there an open crevice in all the wide world into which it is unwilling to enter, or where it fails to throw in its heaven-lit smiles. It is free. And so is Christ. The Gospel day opened gradually as man could bear its light. Only some of the more exalted of the race caught its first morning beams. But it has since diffused itself into every nook of the world, and now struggles for entrance into every heart in every nation. Christ is offered now as freely to Gentile as Jew. He is the Saviour of the poor as well as of the rich, and on the same terms of free grace to each and all willing to accept Him. He is the true Light, ready to lighten every man that cometh into the world.

It also appertains to the nature of light to be all-revealing. Darkness obscures the vision. Where darkness prevails perception is limited. A pit may gape at our feet; a murderer may be waiting in our path; a dagger may be aimed at our heart; each touch may be a stain and each step defilement; but darkness prevents our knowing it. Only when daylight comes can we see and know the truth.

And Christ is the great Revealer. By Him we come to know God and our true selves. By Him we learn who and where we are, what our needs

are, and how to relieve them. One of the hardest things in the world is to make people believe that they are guilty and lost beings. The reason is, they are in the dark. They need the light to show them themselves. And that light is Christ. Only let a man compare himself with Jesus, and try himself in the light of Christ's life and teachings, and it will not be long till he sees that self of his to be a mere mass of guilt, that world of his love a monster, whose very embrace is filth and whose cup of joy is death.

Light is self-revealing. It shows itself. And so is Christ. No one can contemplate Him without being impressed with His great glory. His person, His cross, His love, His blood, His word, and everything concerning Him, have depths of preciousness which are manifest to those who draw near to Him, and enter into close communion with Him. It is when we walk with Him in the way, and sit down with Him to meat, and hear Him lay open to us the Scriptures, that His excellences appear as beauties in the sunlight.

Light is lifegiving. The world is dead without light. Where the sun rarely shines there is barren dreariness. Perpetual winter, or perpetual darkness, is perpetual desolation. It is the warming light of spring that starts the dormant germs, swells the buds, and clothes the vineyard, the field, and the wood with life, fragrance, luxuriance, and plenty. So is Christ. Where He is not, there is spiritual barrenness. But when His beams shine in upon the soul, the seeds of virtue

put forth, and the tree of faith lifts up its starry bloom, and the fruits and flowers of love and grace fill the face of heaven with praise.

Is it your desire then, dear friends, to enjoy that light? Throw open your heart, and it is yours. Open to it, and it will flow in, as water through the lifted gate. You need waste no time in gathering up the wherewithal to purchase it. All your worth is nothing. All your merit is only demerit. Your very best is mixed with sin. Only plead misery and take mercy. Bewail darkness and accept light. Cast away your earthly tapers and take to the sun of righteousness. Wait on God, and the Dayspring of Salvation will visit you with joyous light.

Many false lights have been kindled on these shores of time,—many which lure to rocks, and quicksands, and whirlpools of destruction. Vain meteors glare from many pulpits, and in many books, and on many platforms. And many are being led into the bogs and abysses of error and darkness. But, as there is but one sun in the firmament, so there is but one Christ in the Bible,—but one true lamp of life. Nor need any one be without that light, if willing to accept and possess it. No one is condemned because there is no light; the condemnation is this, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light. People fail of true light because they avoid it, and dislike it, and are not willing to suffer the rebukes which it brings upon their darling sins and ignorances. Put away sin,

crucify evil lusts, turn away from beholding vanity, look to Jesus, and you will find the light which bringeth salvation.

Some of you, dear friends, have found that light, and find it sweet and pleasant. Your light has come. The Daystar from on high hath visited you, and poured in His blessed rays upon your souls. Be careful then to walk in that light. Keep to it until, like Moses on the mount, you become luminous from it. Drink it in, and reflect it, that others seeing your good works may glorify the Father in heaven. So shall you be light in the Lord, and Christ shall be your everlasting Light.

Walk in the light ! So shalt thou know
That fellowship of love,
His Spirit only can bestow,
Who reigns in light above.

Walk in the light ! and sin, abhorred,
Shall ne'er defile again ;
The blood of Jesus Christ thy Lord
Shall cleanse from every stain.

Walk in the light ! and thou shalt find
Thy heart made truly His,
Who dwells in cloudless light enshrined,
In whom no darkness is.

A Marvellous Believer.

Third Sunday after Epiphany.

When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said unto them that followed, Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.—MATT. 8 : 10.

FAITH is the great thing in practical Christianity. The Scriptures everywhere assign it a most exalted place. We are justified by faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." And as our eternal salvation depends on our faith, all the doings and appointments of the Saviour with reference to mankind look to the creation and development of it.

The text stands in connection with a case in which Jesus found faith so great as to command His special admiration. It is said that He "marvelled" at it. This does not mean that it took Him by surprise, or that it came upon Him as an astounding wonder; for He well knew what was in man. And whatever of the marvellous or the uncommon there was about it, it was wrought by His Spirit. But it was so superior, in a case so unpromising, and begotten under so many disadvantages, that He held it up as a marvel unto

men, carrying in it a just rebuke to the incredulity and skepticism of the Jews and of all unbelievers.

People often greatly mistake as to what faith is. They have a notion that things must be positively demonstrated before they can safely be believed. Their philosophy is that "*seeing* is believing." But it is a mistaken philosophy. It is not the way they act in ordinary things. Faith does not rest on demonstration. It is a confident looking to an end which is not and cannot yet be a matter of demonstration. The man who sows his seed for a future harvest *believes*; that is, he confidently expects that by these means the harvest will come; but he has no absolute proof that it ever will come. A merchant embarks in business *believing*; that is, confidently expecting that he can make it pay; but he has no certain guarantee that it *will*. A traveller takes passage on a ship *believing*; that is, confidently expecting that it will bring him safely to the point he wishes to reach; but he is without demonstration that so it will be. In all such cases people adventure on probabilities, not upon demonstrated certainties. Having considered the nature and possibilities of the case and found the balance of probabilities in their favor, they have no hesitation in entering upon it. They trust that all will turn out as they hope; and this is their *faith*, which makes real to them for the time what is simply a thing of expectation. And it is the same in matters of Christianity. We must trust for what we cannot

see. We must rest on probabilities and promises. To demand and wait for absolute demonstration and infallible certainty as a condition of believing, is an absurdity,—a contradiction in terms; for what is thus made absolutely sure is knowledge, and no longer faith.

The faith referred to in the text certainly was not founded on absolute demonstration. It was simply the result of a contemplation of facts, and honest reasonings from those facts, begetting in the man the strong persuasion on which he acted, and which he so splendidly expressed. And so it is in every case.

Let us consider, then, wherein lay the greatness of this man's faith, and how it worked.

First of all, it was great in view of the disadvantages under which it was formed. The man was a Gentile, a heathen. He had been brought up amid the darkness and falsities of paganism. All his early impressions were very unfavorable to correct religious belief. Much of his early education, and of his national and family influence, he had to overcome, as well as the prevailing contempt in which the proud Romans held the Jews.

Moreover, he was a soldier, a captain of the Roman army stationed at Capernaum to keep the restless Jews in order. The military profession can hardly be regarded as favorable to godliness. It is an intensely worldly and self-consequential profession, beset with peculiar temptations to recklessness, profanity, dissoluteness, sensuality,

and vainglory. It is in general animated by a spirit quite alien to the virtues that belong to a devout Christian.

But with all these hindrances and disadvantages, this man became a thorough believer, a proselyte to the Jewish faith, and thence an honored confessor of the power and glory of Christ.

Some are disposed to think themselves excusable from all attention to matters of religion because of their unfavorable surroundings. But they dishonor themselves and dishonor God by such a plea. Where the light of the Gospel shines there is no situation in this world in which God and His Christ may not be remembered, honored, and believed in, even to the saving of the soul. People belie the truth to their own hurt when they allow themselves any other conclusion. They may charge their ungodliness and prayerless indifference upon their peculiar circumstances, but the real fault of it lies in their own breasts. Had they the will, the desire, the earnestness, no external surroundings could hinder them. Nay, the greater the antagonisms, the greater the triumph. The giant saints of old, such as Moses, Elijah, and Daniel, were not hothouse nurslings; and all the greater was this heathen soldier's faith, because it came and grew in spite of pagan prepossessions, and the snares and ambitions that beset military life.

The faith of this man was great also in contrast with that of the Jews. Of them it was expected that they would accept and welcome the Christ.

They had been brought up and trained to that end. Their whole education, and the spirit of their nation from the beginning, ran in this direction. Their advantages were the most favorable on earth. But when the Messiah came they were among the slowest to believe. They had everything to convince and persuade them. They demanded miracles, and He gave them in abundance. They called for authority, and He quoted to them the testimony of Moses and the prophets, and of John the Baptist, whom they knew and honored. There came a voice from heaven at His Baptism declaring Him the beloved Son of the Eternal Father. And even the demons let go their holds on men and ran howling from His presence, and in their terror declared Him the Son of the living God. But the Jewish rulers explained it all away, and there were few to credit His claims. And to their shame and condemnation this Gentile, this heathen soldier, believed and was blessed.

Great also was his faith in the manner in which he reasoned it out. His own unfavorable profession furnished the foundation for his argument. He was a man under authority, and he could do no otherwise than obey the orders of those above him. But he also had soldiers under him, who were obliged to do his bidding. And this was the groundwork of a strain of reasoning more forcible, more affecting, more sublime, than imagination had ever conceived, or heart felt, or tongue expressed. Jesus was to his view the mighty and

invincible Cæsar in the realm of spiritual and healing forces, who needed only to speak and it was done, or to command and it would be as He said. Here was faith in its grandest conceptions, such as Jesus had not found even in Israel.

There is a faith, very orthodox and exalted in its conceptions, yet very inert and feeble in its effects upon the heart and life. The Scriptures call it a *dead* faith. It may be theoretically true, but has nothing practical to answer to it. The faith of this centurion was not of that sort. It was with him a living, active, and influential principle. It affected his whole nature, spirit, and conduct. It was a living faith.

It made him humane and kindhearted, as shown in his tender regard for his slave. Roman masters were sometimes gentle, but mostly harsh, severe, and barbaric toward those in such relations; but this man had a heart to feel for his suffering fellow-man although a slave, and to do all he could to relieve his sufferings and save his life. And so, though we speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have faith even to remove mountains, and have not charity, all our Christianity is defective, and all our religion is mere emptiness.

This man's faith made him active and generous toward the cause of true religion. He respected and favored the Jews because they worshipped the true and living God; and he gave decisive and magnificent proof of this in building them a syn-

agogue. He realized the value and importance of public worship, and of fitting accommodations for it; and he voluntarily gave plentifully and ungrudgingly of his private means to that end. And wherever living faith exists, there will needs be deep practical interest in the maintenance of the sanctuary and the support of divine service. To neglect that is to discount the whole cause we profess to honor, and our faith is not yet what it needs to become a living reality.

And still another feature developed in this man as the direct fruit of his faith in Christ was his remarkable humility. This he showed in the manner of his solicitation of the Saviour's interposition in behalf of his suffering servant. He was a Roman military officer, in command of the place; and yet with what modesty, diffidence, and reverent fear of offending, did he apply to Jesus! Twice he sent messengers, made up of the highest Jewish officials, deeming himself unworthy to approach in person one so high and holy as Jesus. And when the Saviour was on His way to the man's home he met Him with entreaties not to trouble himself further, but to speak the word only, as he, a soldier and an alien, was not worthy to have Him come under his roof. Nor is it possible for us to have true faith in Christ without feeling our unworthiness, or without being deeply humbled in His presence, by reason of the vast distance which our sins have interposed between us and His sublime holiness. A true believer is humble and modest.

And in these expressions, outworkings, and fruits of this man's faith, we get a still deeper insight into the greatness of what the Saviour so highly commended and what is so necessary for us.

And now a few observations on the general subject.

The first that strikes me is the pungent reproof and rebuke which the case of this Centurion brings to modern unbelievers. He came to honored faith in Jesus under very limited opportunities and against very serious disadvantages. And if there was ground for wonder at his faith, how much greater the ground for surprise at the unfaith of those who, after the fulfilment of so much that was foretold, the revolutionary and new creating power of the Saviour's life, death, and resurrection,—after all the wonderful manifestations of His gifts,—and after the glory the centuries have woven around His Name, the progress of His Church, the dethronement of paganism, the conversion of the Cæsars, and the common sentiment of the most enlightened people on earth,—still doubt, and hesitate, and take upon themselves to reject and confute what the toils of Apostles and martyrs, and the experiences of eighteen hundred years, have so universally and divinely planted and authenticated! If the queen of the south is to rise up in the judgment with the men of that generation, and condemn them, because she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, while they despised and

rejected the Greater than Solomon ; will not this Roman soldier rise up in condemnation of the people of our day, who have a thousandfold better chances than he, and yet never cast a believing thought to the blessed Christ, or at all apply to Him as their Saviour and hope? Ho, ye neglectors of your sick and dying souls, whither will ye look for help, with Jesus spurned and His Salvation trampled under foot?

But there is a more cheerful inference from the faith of this Centurion. It is an inference formulated by the Saviour himself. If this man, against so many disadvantages, could rise to faith so exalted, why may not many others in similar circumstance? Yes, this case shows there may be many consistent believers where we would not expect to find them? Hence the Master's declaration: "I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven," while those from whom everything was to be hoped, even the very children of the kingdom, fail altogether. We must not judge outsiders too harshly, nor condemn the heathen and soldiers too indiscriminately; for, with all their unfavorable surroundings, they may turn out better than ourselves.

However, the great central lesson for us all is, to make diligent use of our opportunities; to embrace the Christ as He comes to us; to take Him as our Helper and glorious Lord; to look to Him in our need; to trust implicitly to His Word;

and humbly to submit ourselves to Him as the great and merciful spiritual Cæsar, whom none can neglect nor disobey without forfeit of all that is most precious to the soul, whether for this world, or that which is to come.

The Frightened Voyagers.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

And He said unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? —
MATT. 8: 26.



HE Speaker here referred to was Christ. The place was on board a boat on the inland sea of Galilee. The occasion was the alarm and outcries of the disciples in the midst of a terrific storm. The whole scene was one of impressive sublimity, beautifully described by the Evangelist in a few simple sentences, and full of suggestive significance.

That sea is a picture of this world. Those afloat upon it represent the voyage of life. And that storm symbolizes the adversities and troubles often encountered in this voyage.

I. It appears, then, first of all, that the following of Christ sometimes brings into very trying scenes. He went aboard this boat, and took His disciples with Him into the storm. Christianity does not exempt from trials in this world. The following of Jesus may save from many a sorrow, but there are others into which it leads. This was specially true of the first Christians.

Earthly life is like that Tiberian lake, some-

times calm and beautiful, but frequently thrown into violent commotion, often lashed with furious tempests. And our way lies through that lake. The Saviour himself said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation;" and that word has held true in every age. If any one expects to reach the happy land without encountering storms and troubles of one sort or another, he will be greatly disappointed.

But all such experiences have in them a good and beneficent purpose, or the Saviour would not lead His followers into them. They are not accidental. They belong to a divine system so ordered as to make "all things work together for good to them that love God." This storm on Genessaret was not unforeseen by the Saviour, but was meant to give and impress lessons which could not otherwise be so well taught.

These disciples needed to be made more sensible of their own helplessness and their dependence on their Lord. They needed to be more deeply convinced of His abundant power and sufficiency in every emergency. He had wrought many great and wonderful things on land; but there they had some chance for helping themselves. It remained for Him to show the greatness of His power over the winds and the sea, where they had no recourse but in his almightiness. And some beneficent results are contemplated in all the troubles and afflictions of the saints. Hence we are exhorted not to think it strange that fiery trials come, as though they were something quite

out of the ordinary range of things ; but to look upon them as from God, meant to try, purify, develop, and bless us, and to perfect us in the likeness of our Lord.

When the farmer sifts his wheat, it is not to damage it, but to separate it from intermixtures which depreciate its worth. When the blacksmith thrusts the piece of steel into the hot fires, it is not to harm or destroy it, but to soften it to answer better to his purposes and its own exaltation. And for similar reasons Jesus leads His people into storms and troubles. The cross is the way to the crown ; and our greater glory in the end stands connected with these earthly trials.

II. In the next place, it is to be noted that Christ was with these people in the ship. Poor, unthinking mortals are apt to overlook this in their troubles. When things are all smooth before them they take it as a matter of course ; but when afflictions and dangers are upon them they fear and despair as if they had no Saviour, no God. They do not realize that Jesus is with them in the ship, and so miss the consolation they might otherwise have.

The great Roman Emperor was once in a dreadful storm at sea. The appearances were that all would be lost. The captain of the vessel was full of alarm and ready to despair. But the Emperor said to him, "Why do you fear for the ship? Know you not that it carries Cæsar?" But mightier and greater than all the Cæsars is Jesus, who is with His people amid whatever storms

may come; nor can fatal disaster happen while He is with them in the ship.

But though Jesus was with these people, "He was asleep." He knew what was coming, but He was quite composed and serene in view of it. He knew what the distress and terror of His disciples would be, but He slept,—slept while the waves were dashing over the ship and the sea was ready to engulf them. Though He is the omnific Saviour, and is never oblivious touching the wants and dangers of His people, He is not careful to exempt them from troubles, nor to help them out of them till the purpose of them has been fully tested. Sometimes He gives over His people to the most unequal conflicts, and to extremities that might seem to prove that He cared not for them. It was so with Job. It was so with Israel in Egypt. It was so with David under the persecutions of Saul. It was so with John the Baptist pining in Herod's prison. And it is so with many suffering saints in all lands to this day. But still, though thus seemingly regardless of their distresses, He is with them in the ship, so that they cannot sink or perish without His sinking and perishing with them. Hence His Word: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"

III. Still further, these occurrences were meant to teach, that, however great the storms and troubles that may come upon Christ's followers, glorious deliverance is at hand. He who commands the winds and the sea, though asleep, is within call, and ready to help in every time of need. He

lets things go on to try our patience and our faith, to prove to us our utter helplessness without Him, and to turn our eyes, and prayers, and despairing cries to Him.

But, in the last distressing hour,
He's sure to show His saving power.
The thickest danger is the place
Where He displays His saving grace.

And when these alarmed "disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us; we perish. He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm." Their "little faith" still served to turn them to their Lord for succor, and their cries were not disregarded. He reproved them for fearing the ship would sink with Him in it, but not for breaking in upon His repose. A distinguished preacher, commenting upon the scene, exclaims: "I see Him opening His eyes,—but not with surprise. Nothing astonished him. I see Him going upon deck,—not in haste. Haste is from confusion. He was never in haste. I see Him facing the storm, and speaking to it as a living thing that could hear Him. He rebuked the winds and the sea.—But what said He?—The wild elements understood, and they obeyed. And there was a great calm." It was a wonderful miracle,—a miracle of deliverance,—that so astounded those for whom it was wrought, that they marvelled, saying, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

But therein was the demonstration that no troubles or adversities of this world are too great for Him to control, and that we need never despair of His help when we cry to Him as our Saviour. It was the picture and pledge of what all suffering and praying believers may count on in any extremity to which they may be reduced in this present evil world. Even where deliverance would seem impossible it is at hand in our Saviour's almightiness, if only we prayerfully and obediently address ourselves to Him.

IV. Furthermore, it is here shown and emphasized that the hand to lay hold on Christ's help in trouble is *faith*. Weak and little as was the faith of these disciples, it brought them deliverance. It turned them to Christ as their only Helper. It caused them to bring their trouble to Him, and it animated their cries for His interference to save them. They had no idea how that deliverance was to come; but their faith was in Christ, and to Him they looked as their only hope, if perchance He could do something for them. They were sure they would perish unless He could help; and it brought them salvation. And if "little faith" could accomplish so much, what may not a strong and vigorous faith secure?

Here then is our recourse in all straights and necessities. In Jesus is our strength and hope. He is always with His people even unto the end of the world. He has covenanted never to leave nor forsake them. He is as near, if not nearer, in their sorrows and trials than in their hours of joy

and peace. His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear, nor His arm shortened that He cannot save. But our eyes must be toward Him as our only help. We must believe that He is able and willing to do for us according to our need, and to bring us safely through. We must confide in His power, His goodness, and His superintending care.

And for this His invitations, promises, and pledges are ample. He has given proof enough that He is a Saviour, and a great one, able and ready to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. And why then, in any case, should we doubt or despair? All we need is faith,—faith that lays hold on Jehovah's strength, in patient assurance that He will make all right in the end.

Triumphant faith !

She can pluck mountains from their rooted thrones,
And hurl them into ocean; and from pain,
And prisons, and contempt,—extort the palm
Of everlasting triumph.

Wherever faith is there is power, there is victory, there is salvation. Be the difficulty, the trial, the sorrow, the trouble what it may, where there is faith to lay hold on Jesus, to rest believingly on Him, it makes sufferings light, dulls the edge of pain, and swallows up despair in the assurance of glad deliverance in the end. Hence the word: "Be not afraid; only believe." "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"

A great and miraculous calm was wrought by Christ for these tried and despairing disciples

when they looked to Him in their distress. And what He did for them on Galilee He will do in His own good time for all His storm-tossed people who in like manner look to and confide in Him. This whole transaction prophesies the ultimate outcome of the work of the Christ. One word expresses it; and that word is *PEACE*.

To all fearful and distressed believers, *Peace*. To disturbed and troubled nature, *Peace*. To growing and suffering creation, *Peace*. Yes, from Jesus of Nazareth there is yet to go forth upon all disastrous winds and waves of earth a new command, to silence their afflictive commotions, to calm their fierceness, to tame down their wild fury, and to spread over all this disturbed and turbulent scene of things "*a great calm*," amid which He shall stand out in the glory of divine Lordship, while His rescued and delivered people kneel around Him in adoring wonder, as blissful as it is sublime.

The great matter is to have Jesus with us in our voyage over this troubled sea. Without Him no ship can outweather the storms, or land us safely on the further shore. We may think we can make it in our own strength and wisdom; but we soon shall find how helpless we are against absolute despair.

But, to have Jesus with us in the voyage, we must enter the ship wherein He is embarked. That ship is the old ship of Zion. It is not an imposing craft, but it is the only one that can bear us in safety to the better land.


These are days in which many undertake to make crafts of their own, and venture upon them where no Jesus is. But they know not the strength of the storms that await them, and will find out too late what miscalculations they have made.

God help us to be wise, and to understand this, to consider wherein our salvation lies!

The Gospel Yoke.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me : for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.—MATT. 11 : 29, 30.

UR blessed Saviour had just uttered that sublime and touching invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;"—an invitation which still stands open to all the burdened and sorrowing children of men. Let the trouble be what it may, there is relief for it in Jesus, and His offer is to help and comfort all who rightly come to Him.

But, in proposing to accept His gracious invitation it is important for us to understand what it involves. In seeking unto Christ as our Helper, there must needs be a willing submission of ourselves to His will and way ;—a taking upon us of His yoke. He has his own manner of dispensing His mercies. They can be had for the taking, but not as we may fancy, prescribe, or dictate. He is an adequate resort in all trouble and unrest, but He has His own manner of imparting the blessing, and we must defer to Him, trust Him, and wait His time.

To come to Christ means the putting of ourselves in the hands and care of Christ, accepting Him as our Lord and Guide, and giving ourselves to walk, and serve, and trust, as He may direct and order.

Nor are we to suppose that there is nothing burdensome in it. Jesus here speaks of both a "yoke," and a "burden," which those who come to Him are to take up, and bear. The language is figurative, but very significant.

The "*yoke*" tells of restraint upon natural freedom, likes, and pleasures, and of service to be rendered. Harnessed oxen are not left to go and do as they please, but must move, and use their powers, as the Master wills; and the same holds good in our being joined to Christ.

And so the "*burden*" tells of something to be borne,—some weight to be carried,—some sort of load laid upon the shoulders. Naturally, there is much to be left, which it is not always easy to sacrifice. A new course of life is to be followed, which is not always what we would fancy. There is a profession to be made, much native selfishness and pride to be cast off, and a new Master to be served. And it is not always easy to abandon old ways, to vanquish heart-unbelief, to endure the taunts and ridicule of the despisers of religion, and to keep up genuine zeal and fidelity in Christian duty.

There is then something of a yoke and burden in the case. The Scriptures employ various figures to describe it, all of which, when analyzed,

imply the same thing. It is called a wrestle,—a race,—a warfare,—calling for pluck, watchfulness, training, and energy, even to the giving up of body, life, and limb, when the question is whether we are to be true to our Lord or not.

But while Christianity brings under the yoke, and has its peculiar burden, the Saviour here assures us that His yoke is “easy,” and His burden “light.” Many would not so take it. Considered with respect to worldly interests, or apart from everything else, the undertaking looks formidable enough,—so formidable that multitudes cannot be persuaded to adventure beyond a few outside rudiments. Depraved, selfish, proud, and vainglorious human nature is not so ready to surrender its self-consequence and return to the condition of childhood to begin life over again. And yet, here are the plain words of Christ himself, that His yoke *is* easy, and His burden *is* light. How then is this to be understood.

Well, Christ’s yoke is easy, as compared with the yoke which the Pharisees laid upon people’s necks. Think of the taxes of one-tenth of the increase of everything,—of the costly offerings required at almost every turn or event of life,—of the laborious and expensive triennial visitations to Jerusalem to keep the great feasts,—of the endless round of legalistic observances, gifts, and sacrifices, which, after all, could not justify him that did the service. All this made up a yoke and a burden which Peter says was more than man could bear. But, from all this, Christ

hath set us free. These oppressive taxes, painful rites, expensive offerings, and vexatious laws, are all done away in Christianity. The law of our dispensation is, "Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbaths," which were but shadows of the better things that have now come. And in comparison with that slavery to shadowy ceremonies, the yoke of Christ is easy and His burden light. Here are only a few simple and easy rites, which oppress no one. Here are substantial and eternal benefits to be enjoyed without money and without price. And while there is call for grateful acknowledgment and thank-offering, it is all left to men's freewill, and the impulses of the loving Christian heart, to apportion and do.

So Christ's yoke is easy compared with the yoke and burden of sin. The way of the transgressor is hard. It may be flattering, and agreeable at the start. But for the wayward and godless the evil day will come. The triumphing of the wicked is short. Conscience, long suppressed and trampled, will assert itself at the last, biting like a serpent and stinging like an adder.

Nor is any mere worldling as happy as he seems. If our gay and godless people would speak out the truth, they would be compelled to say with Solomon, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." And what sad wrecks of homes, and happiness, and life itself, are constantly overtaking those who give loose to their lusts and carnal ambition

at the expense of purity, honesty, and righteousness! What throes of incurable remorse ultimately come to those who thus sell themselves to the devil! How do their souls agonize when they think of the loving ones they have sent to the grave with broken hearts, the ruin they have brought upon the confiding and the innocent, the dishonor and shame with which they have loaded their names, the sorrows and irremediable damage brought upon them by their sins! And when it comes to the solemn encounter with death, judgment, and eternity, how many are turned to utter madness by their guilty remembrances, or plunged into horrors which they cannot bear! O how often are our hearts made to bleed and melt in pity over the mental anguish and inconsolable torment of men, who, for a little momentary gratification, have yielded to the tempter! Can we look at the facts, and not be compelled to confess that the yoke of Christ is a paradise by the side of such burdens? What Christian has ever mourned at the last for having given his life to God and righteousness? When has regret and remorse ever come to him, except for having been so slow and poor in the service of his Lord?

Easy also is the yoke and light the burden of Christianity, as compared with the task of those who propose to secure justification and heaven by their own works and virtues. To fill out in heart, word, and deed all the demands of the law for every day and hour of life is what no mere man ever has done or ever can do. He who tries it,

even to the utmost of his powers, will find the bed too short and the covering quite too narrow. He may sometimes persuade himself that he has succeeded, as Paul once thought, or that he is in a fair way to succeed; but when he comes to look at things as they are, he soon finds rents in his garment which he tries in vain to mend. Seeing himself in the light of God's truth, his confidence must cower and his hopes wilt, as did those of Paul, because he has not yet begun to meet what is required. What matters it that he has not been an atheist, a liar, a thief, a murderer, an adulterer, and is quite free from many black stains that are upon some others? If his heart has never been given to God, and he has never accepted Christ as his Redeemer, he is still under condemnation. The Christian is indeed bound to live virtuously, but he never thinks of being saved by his works. He has a Saviour who stands for him; and because he has made Christ his refuge and hope, there remains for him no more condemnation, notwithstanding his deficiencies and failures. In and through the Christ, in whom he trusts, his peace is made, and he is not oppressed with a work which he cannot accomplish.

Christ's yoke is easy also, because of the loving spirit in which it is accepted and borne. Love is never weary in doing and bearing for the object in which it delights. What would not a true mother sacrifice for the child she loves? And when the soul is once filled with adoring admiration and gratitude for the matchless goodness of

Jesus and His unspeakable sacrifices for its redemption, and considers the exceeding great and precious blessings which He has purchased for it by His blood, nothing is too hard for it to do and bear for Him. To be able to serve such a friend and Saviour then becomes a delight, an honor, a privilege. Love thrills the heart. Love quickens the step. Love inflames the zeal and desire to please. Love does away with all sense of hardship in the service it renders. And where true love to Jesus has been begotten in the soul, it is glad to confess His Name, and to do and suffer all His good and holy will.

And yet again, His yoke is easy, and His burden light, because of His gracious help and sympathy. He does not leave us to struggle alone in our weakness, trials, and difficulties. He knows what it is to bear adversities and sufferings, and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. His tender compassion and the comforts of the Holy Ghost are ever with us. His eyes are upon us in every perplexity and in every moment of want or weakness. He has set up for us a throne of grace to which we may come with boldness to obtain mercy and grace to help in every time of need. And if we do but trust Him, He has engaged never to leave nor forsake us. Having bought us with his blood, He is most anxious to bring us through to share His glory. He knows when we become faint and weary, and has provided many a meal for us in our pilgrimage by which to refresh us in our heavenward journey.


When things are dark about us He often causes light to spring up, of which we never dreamed. What we thought would be impossible to bear we do not find half so crushing as we supposed. At every point the assurance is of the presence of grace sufficient. And with all is the promise of a blessed heaven, in which all the suffering, toil, and services in this world will have their everlasting compensation.

'Tis thus Christ's yoke is easy and His burden light. And we have only to take that yoke upon us and learn of Him, who is meek and lowly in heart, to find the coveted goal of life—even rest for our souls.

The Christian Stadium.

Septuagesima.

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.—1 Cor. 9 : 24, 25.

HE Apostle was here writing to a people familiar with the Isthmian games, which consisted of racing, wrestling, and pugilism. He had perhaps witnessed some of these himself. At any rate, he knew of them, and saw in them a striking picture of earthly life, particularly of Christian life. And we have only to consider them to be impressed with the aptness of the figure.

This world is a *stadium*,—a race-course,—and the great mass of the population is running, struggling, competing for some prize. With some, to their shame, life may be entirely aimless and indifferent; but most people have some goal for which they are striving. It is not always the same thing, but always something which enlists their energies and efforts. The racers and competitors in the Grecian games sought to win a certain crown of honor and glory awarded to the victor; and so nearly every one is aiming, con-

tending, and laboring for some object on which the heart is set. It may be gain,—a comfortable living,—riches,—place,—office,—honor,—distinction in society,—lustful gratification and pleasure,—or something else.

We have only to look abroad upon the world around us to see the agitation and tumult of human beings striving and contending on the stadium of life. And this intense and ever-intensifying commotion and putting forth of energy and strength would be a spectacle of interest to heavenly beholders, if the object of it were always worthy of beings created in the image of God and having an immortal inheritance to gain.

Unfortunately, such worthiness does not generally obtain. Earthly interests, indeed, are not to be undervalued or neglected. Too much depends upon them to be despised. We must live, and we need to exert ourselves for an honest living. There is much to be done and cared for respecting this world in order to make the best of ourselves and of the purposes of life. But this scene of tumultuous endeavor, contention, and activity, in the great majority of cases, is moved by principles, feelings, and hopes limited to this present life, and hence in ill accord with what becomes beings presently to be transferred to an untried eternity. This world's prizes are often mere vanity and emptiness; and the securing of them is frequently more of a misfortune than a gain; while the pursuit of them is a sore vexation, if not a miserable degradation. At best, the high-

est earthly gain is only "a corruptible crown,"—the possession of a day quickly passed,—a glory that must soon disappear forever. And for beings made but a little lower than the angels, to devote all their highborn faculties and powers to the winning of what this world has to give, at the sacrifice of the soul and an eternity of blessedness, is an infatuation ignoble enough to make the very angels weep.

But there is a nobler and worthier race for man to run. It is the race which the Gospel of Jesus sets before us. Christianity also has its stadium. We come to it by our Baptism. We enter upon it when we begin to act and live for Christ and eternity. We run this race when, with faith and hope in Jesus, we steadfastly persevere in Christian duty and effort, striving against sin, and doing our best to live godly, upright, and useful lives. 'This terminates when the summons from on high comes to call us away from earth. We win its prize when, by divine grace, we hold out faithful until death. And the victor's crown we shall receive when our Lord and Judge shall come in His glory to give reward unto His saints and to all who love His appearing.

And to the running of this race, as candidates for an immortal crown, all are invited; and to earnest and unflagging effort to win in it, all professing Christians are everywhere exhorted. It may involve trying and disheartening discipline; it may require many a hard conflict; and, so far as this world is concerned, self-denial and tribula-

tion may have to be encountered ; but the word of the great Exemplar and Leader is: "*Follow Me*"—"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." And hence the apostolic appeal, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith ; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Have we, then, entered upon this race? We are all in the common race of life, and must somehow run it, whether we will or no. But have we entered upon the *Christian* race, where alone the immortal crown is to be won? If not, the greatest and most momentous purpose of our existence is as yet untouched. And if we have entered the lists to run this race, we have undertaken what demands all the strength of will and vigor of action we can in any way command. It requires earnestness and determination to be an approved and victorious Christian, and a perseverance which knows no surrender. The stadium is lined with wrecks of people who entered with joyous hearts and glad hopes, and some who ran well for a season, but when trial came, and they were obliged to fight and agonize to maintain themselves, they became weary and faint in their minds, dropped out of the ranks, and so perished

by the way. The Christian race is also a life-race; and only those who hold on, steadfast unto the end, can win the crown.

And yet, alas! the vast majority of people are far more devoted and persistent in their efforts for the perishable and transient things of this world than to secure the crown of immortal kings. The contestants in the ancient games exerted every power in them to win the fading garlands held out to the victors; and yet where substantial and eternal honors are at stake men act as if they were nothing worth, or would anyway come to them without troubling to secure them.

Look at the devotee of Mammon. Who can number his cares and anxieties? Who can measure his fatigues, exposures, and self-denials just for wealth? Nothing is too much for him. No failures or dangers hinder him. His days and his nights, his health and life, are all freely thrown into his schemes and efforts for gold and riches. He may think himself a Christian; but what does his Christianity receive in comparison with what he gives to greed and avarice?

Look at the devotee of ambition. What pains, and sacrifices, and toils, and cares, even to the compromise of all righteous principles, does he bring to the idol of his worship? What watchful caution,—what surrender of dignity,—what pressure of anxiety,—what burden of soul,—is he willing to assume, if only he can win the prize on which his heart is set? The securement of the favor of God and eternal blessedness would cost

him no greater sacrifices, no severer curb, no more earnest exertion; but his carnal ambition commands him, while the claims of God and immortality are dishonored and put aside.

Look at the worshipper of lust and pleasure. His vices bring upon him inevitable punishments even in this present life; but he bears them all, and braves perseverance in filthy ways, while denouncing Christian life as too burdensome and hard. Pursuing amusement, and fashion, and frolic in its varied rounds, what labor or expense in preparing for them,—what care and impatience in waiting for them,—what exhaustion and fatigue in acting out his part in them,—what lassitude and *ennui* in recovering from the effects of his participation in them,—does he accept and endure; while the ways of wisdom and salvation are rejected as too repulsive, too severe.

Nay; look where you will; observe in all the world the people who are racing and struggling for its prizes; and you will see multitudes willing and ready to do, sacrifice and endure more, to win for themselves destruction, than for God, or Christ, the salvation of their souls, or the crown of everlasting life. Even professed Christians volunteer their hundreds for clubs and lodges and worldly leagues, while grudging their tens or fives to the Church of the living God.

O the inconsistencies and follies that obtain on this momentous matter! O the subtle witchery which the Arch-deceiver has succeeded in throwing over the children of men! What prize of

earth can warrant or excuse such absorption and expenditure for its attainment, which is so short-lived, so unsatisfactory, and when attained must so soon be given up? What if some are successful enough to win what they so eagerly strive for, when they must presently have done with it as completely as if they never had had it? Will that measure the real worth of life, or be a just compensation for such lifelong cares, toils, efforts, and expenditures, which, by the time we touch it, and think ourselves happy in its possession, perishes in our hands, or death comes and cuts us off from it for ever? Ah me; "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Dear friends, there is nothing in this world that pays, blesses, and rewards, like believing, earnest and unfaltering service of God and His Christ. One who tried it at the greatest cost declares, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." The true Christian man, no matter what the earthly condition, is the noblest, truest, and happiest man; for he is abundantly armed for life and for death; and no reverses or surprises can rob him of his spiritual comforts or his joyous hopes.

First of all, he who earnestly and perseveringly runs this race *is sure to win*. It is not so in other races. They which run in them, "run all, but one receiveth the prize." Many a noble Grecian athlete, having done the utmost in his

power to succeed, had to retire discomfited and crownless, because some one else was able to outdo him. But such a thing can never happen to a faithful Christian racer. Here every one may win. Many may have the strength to distance us in the way; but the weakest, if they will only exert what strength they have, cannot fail. Here the child has an equal chance with the adult, the woman with the man, the feebly endowed with the greatest.

And the crown in this case is "*incorruptible*." Those leaves of olive with which the victors in the ancient games were crowned soon faded and disappeared, and all the honor and glory which they expressed. Where are those chaplets or their wearers now? Perished are they all, their names forgotten, and nothing of all they ever wore worth a farthing to them. But the prize held out to those who run the Christian race is an imperishable crown. It is a crown of life that never fades, and whose wearers are never called to lay it down.

Nor is it an unreal crown; for there are no mockeries or unrealities in heaven. It is a crown that carries with it all that a true crown signifies. Genuine Christians are princes of the blood. They are in their minority now, but destined to a glorious coronation, and to rule and reign with their blessed Lord in the principalities of eternal empire. Through the promises and revelations of God I look over into that "world to come," and I see thrones, and they sit upon them, and

ruling power is given unto them, and they live and reign with Christ in resurrection life as veritable kings of the earth bringing their glory and honor into that golden city of which the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the light.

O the grandeur and glory of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus! Contemplate it, O ye negligent, weary, and faint-hearted, and see and know the worth of a diligent and earnest Christian life. Is it any wonder that the devout apostle should wish and exhort us all to run this race, and so to run it that we may obtain?

And shall we not give heed to his encouraging admonition? To neglect the grand opportunity, and not to win in this race, is to lose the highest good of our being. The great Apostle Paul had sacrificed everything earthly to run this race, and had made sublime progress in it; yet he labored on in godly fear, lest after all he should be a castaway. What then shall be the fate of those who refuse to enter these lists, or loiter in the way, or think to carry this world with them into heaven?

Come, O Spirit of the living God, and quicken us all to spiritual earnestness, that we may each run this race, so as to receive at last the "crown of glory that fadeth not away!"

Respectful Hearing.

Sexigesima.

And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them.—EZEK. 33 : 31.



EZEKIEL was a great preacher. Fancy has pictured him as young and slender, with extended locks and stooping as if under the burden of the Lord. A visible fire was in his eye, and an invisible fire seemed to burn in his soul and inflame all his nature. A ghostly earnestness possessed him ; a wild beauty hung around him ; and an air that said he was not long for this world added a supernatural impressiveness to his youthful aspect. He moved among his people as a saintly apparition, a sun-gilded storm in human shape, untouched by the love of maidens, unterrified by the countenances of elders, undismayed by danger or death, and pursuing his high object with an eagerness of purpose which nothing could dampen, divert, nor turn. Detained in the company of men in flesh and blood, he seemed not of them ; and while walking the earth the companionship of his soul was with the cherubim of glory.

But the most heavenly, devoted, and earnest of preachers do not always have the most satisfactory congregations. The text gives God's own account of the people to whom Ezekiel ministered.

They did not pass the prophet by in total indifference. He so far arrested their attention that they made him the subject of very frequent conversation. They talked of him often and much. Ministers of God are apt to be talked about. Church-going people are much disposed to pass observations on their clergymen, their sermons, abilities, and nearly everything relating to them. It is natural that they should; and it is not always an unfavorable symptom. They may sometimes talk of the preacher as they talk about the weather, for want of something else to say; but often it is from real sympathy and interest in him, their pleasure in his efforts, their comfort in his ministrations, though once in a while perhaps in the way of dissatisfaction, faultfinding, and depreciation. In this case, however, we may suppose that the talk was more on the favorable than on the unfavorable side. The record is that these people acknowledged Ezekiel to be a true and worthy prophet. There was something also in his oratory and efforts which arrested their attention, and set them to talking among themselves as they met along the walls and passed each other's doors. There may have been some unfavorable criticisms and comments; but better those than nothing.

They also encouraged and invited one another to go and hear him. This is not always the ob-

ject and result of people's talk about preachers. But whatever these Jews thought of Ezekiel, they considered him well worth hearing, and spoke one to another, and every one to his brother, saying, "Come, I pray you, and hear the word that cometh forth from the Lord. There be many professed Christians who have very hard work to get themselves out to hear the preached word. These people, however, were not of that sort. They were willing and pleased to go hear Ezekiel themselves, and they were enough interested to try to bring their brethren and acquaintances also to hear him.

Nor was it only for his peculiarities, his eloquence, and the way he handled himself in his ministrations, that they frequented his ministry. It was to hear the word of the Lord that came forth through him. This was another good indication for them.

They likewise behaved with great religious decorum and propriety in their attendance upon the prophet's ministry. The record is that they came with due orderliness as Christian people; that they waited before the prophet the same as if they were in all respects the true, devout, and believing people of God; and that they took in with avidity all that the prophet had to say.

It is a question whether God's book has a like favorable account of those who make up the attendants upon our modern churches. If you will observe the temper and characteristics of those assemblies to which the community most throngs,

you will generally find a ranting mountebank in the pulpit, and a light-hearted and laughing congregation in the pews. They come not after the manner of God's reverent worshippers. They do not sit and hear after the manner of God's people. They do not listen to learn the word of the Lord. They go most for amusement,—for the wit and droll hits of the preacher. In these respects Ezekiel's audiences put to shame many of the most crowded congregations of our modern so-called churches. They came as the most devout people came. They listened and heard as God's people listened. And they conducted themselves in every regard, outwardly at least, as became the most reverent and respectful of worshippers. There was no levity, no indifference, no drowsiness, no wishing that the preacher would get done and let them off. There was real interest, and real desire to hear what God had to say to them. They also professed great attachment to the prophet. They enjoyed and praised his sermons. His utterances were to them "as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument." They held his doctrines to be true and magnificent, his elocution good, his language beautiful, his manner graceful, his illustrations grand and stirring, and everything as it should be in a prophet of Jehovah. All this was very fair and good, and a vast improvement on the average audiences found in our sanctuaries. Any one beholding their devoted manner, seeing their rapt attention, and hearing

their admiring speeches, might have supposed them saints of the very highest order.

But they were very faulty nevertheless, and in the eye of God came very far short, as the text clearly affirms.

There is a great difference between being deeply interested in the ministry of a true and talented preacher, and genuine God-fearing piety. The one may exist without the other. There is in man a strong innate craving for excitement. It is this that sustains places of amusement, theatres, balls, race-courses, risky adventures, and much of our popular literature. Human nature sighs for new sensations; and if it cannot have them in one way, it will try to have them in another. And there is much in the ministry of a skilful and able man of God to gratify this craving. There are many sacred subjects which, in the hands of a bright man, are capable of raising the soul to the highest pitch of interest and delight.

We also have in us a native desire for knowledge, a curiosity to know and understand. Like the Athenians of old, we are all anxious to be informed about every new thing. And a vigorous ministry of divine truth has much in it to teach and please. A gifted and true preacher will ever and anon be bringing forth things that are novel, electrifying, and pleasing, even though they may not sway the life.

People also like to hear how they can be most comfortable and happy. They like to hear of

heaven, even if they never put themselves on the path to get there. They like discourses on the glory, the kingdom, the purposes, and the promises of God, though they never become His willing subjects. It pleases them. It makes them feel better. It helps to make them forget their cares, troubles, and vexations. And so, where there is a warm heart, a lively imagination, and some artistic skill and dramatic genius in a minister of God, there is plenty to make him a popular favorite, on whose lips the multitude delights to hang. It is a pleasant song to them. But there may be all this, as in the case of Ezekiel's hearers, and yet be no spiritual and saving benefit.

The true test of a profitable hearing of the word is not emotion, but obedience,—not the feeling of delight and joy over the impressive magnificence of the truth, but in the power it has to influence our conduct and shape our life. The great defect in Ezekiel's hearers was, not that they were not charmed by what he said, or did not love to hear him descant with that burning vehemence of thought and pictorial description which appear in his prophecies, but that it wrought no change in their hearts, and left them as dead to God and holiness as they came to it. It was not that they lacked in zeal and pleasure in listening to him, or in hanging on the utterances which he brought them from the Lord; but that his beautiful presentations did not arouse their consciences, nor move them to repentance, nor bring them to

faith and spiritual consecration. They were full of eagerness to hear his words, and admired them; but the trouble was, that *they did them not*.

And just so it is with multitudes of Gospel hearers in our day. They love to go to church. It is their delight to hear what they call a good sermon. It kindles their imaginations. It ravishes their souls. It works them up to a lofty pitch of ecstatic feeling, and brings around their fancy such an array of solemn and affecting images that everything else in the world for the time seems to be nothing but emptiness and vanity. They melt with emotion; they swim with exultation; they are lifted with transport; they glow with enthusiasm; heaven itself sometimes seems to open around them; and their whole being is again and again pervaded through and through with what wears the semblance of the most saintly sacredness. But the vision passes. The whirlwind of rapturous enjoyment subsides. The entrancing song ceases. The picture is withdrawn. And presently they are just what they were before. With all their weeping, and admiring, and faculties put upon the stretch of intensest gratification, there is no motion of effective obedience. With their judgment persuaded, their fancy enlivened, their hearing charmed, and all within them feasted by the rich and varied luxuries of a banquet of heavenly truth, they are not brought to the turning point of conversion, or to the practical embrace of a single item of dutifulness. They hear the word, and do homage to the preacher as

one who can play well on an instrument; but the impression soon dies away, and sinks into nothingness, like the cadences of a lovely song, without practical effect.

But, of what use is it to have and to hear the word of God, if we fail to conform to it? The preaching of the Gospel is not for amusement, pleasurable entertainment, or æsthetic gratification. It is to move us to action,—to awaken us to a right consciousness of our wants and our duty,—to make thorough Christians of us, and obedient children of the Lord of hosts, doing His will on earth, and living and waiting for the glory that is hereafter to be revealed. Where this fails, everything fails, however delighted we may be to hear the word, or laudatory of those who preach it. “Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the *doers* of the law.” Our hearing must make us better men and women, or we are only the worse for it.

It is indeed a great thing to hear the word of God. Our eternal life depends upon it. But unless its presentations move us to actions, and work in us fruits of obedience, we lose all the good which it is meant to be to us, and our eternity will be all the more unhappy.

And what, then, is the reason that so many are pleased to hear the Gospel, and willingly assent to its great truths, and are delighted when they can listen to men who can preach it with power, and yet fail to submit themselves to it? The hindering cause may not be the same in all cases;

but the text states where the difficulty lay in Ezekiel's admiring auditors. God's eye saw where the trouble was, and located it first of all in this that their heart went after their gain. It was not that they didn't regard Ezekiel as a true prophet. It was not that they disputed the truth of what he taught. It was not that they did not feel the deepest admiration for his efforts and presentations. But the trouble was that their hearts were at bottom so pre-occupied with what related to their immediate earthly comfort, gain, and pleasure that their admiration of his grand sermons wrought no practical obedience.

And here is the one great trouble with very many church-goers still. They believe in religion. They honor the Church. They favor the Gospel and all its good and faithful ministers. They are pleased to hear the truth of God masterfully preached. They speak with eager commendation of many sermons to which they have listened. Their voices may often be heard inviting and urging friends and neighbors to come and hear certain ministers. All of which is very good, and speaks well for them as far as it goes. But when we ask them to confess that Saviour of whom they like to hear; to enlist fully under that banner which they like to see unfurled and defended with eloquence and power; to renounce the devil and his works and ways, they are never quite prepared. Their bottom feelings after all run in a different channel. They have their own preferences and likes and ideas, to which they

give precedence over the plain and acknowledged demands of God. And in heaven it is written of them, "*their heart goeth after their gain*,"—after their own choosings and pleasure.

Ho, then, ye people who hear God's words, but do them not,—ye that have so long been listening with satisfaction to the messengers of Heaven, but have never found it in your hearts to obey their message,—ye that have been so often delighted with the glorious truths of the Gospel, and are so pleased to hear them expounded,—where do you stand to-day in the matter of obedience? Has your hearing of the truth made you followers of it? Do you, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby? Are you making practical use of that blessed Gospel, in whose masterly presentations you have often found so much pleasure? Alas, for those who have no higher homage to give to the messages of Heaven!

The Passing Saviour.

Quinquagesima.

And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.—LUKE 18:37.

JESUS of Nazareth! Who has not heard of Jesus of Nazareth? For more than eighteen hundred years the world has been resounding with His name, as the sublimest Personage that ever walked the earth in flesh and blood. Nor has there ever lived a man who has drawn to Him more hearts, or more deeply influenced human history and condition. Millions on millions throughout all the earth this day rejoice to call Him Saviour, and build on Him their highest hopes and supremest confidence.

We here behold Him on a journey, marching on foot, accompanied by His chosen disciples, and surrounded by throngs of excited people. It was the most momentous journey ever performed on earth, not indeed in the grandeur of its form, but in its intent and consequences. It was a journey on which hung the hopes of the world, and of all men, for time and eternity. It was

the journey of the only begotten Son of God to give himself up to betrayal by one of his own familiar friends,—to buffetings and lashings and mockings and maltreatment by His enemies,—to the shame and horrors of crucifixion with the worst of criminals, and to immolation, death, and the grave as an atonement for human transgression, that He might redeem a world lying under the condemnation of a violated law. He was not being dragged or driven to it, nor moving without knowing what was to happen; but voluntarily, and with full comprehension of every item of what He was to endure. Aye, it was a journey at which we may well stand amazed, and at which the principalities of the upper worlds doubtless were moved with mysterious wonder.

In this journey we here behold Him in the vicinity of Jericho,—a town nearest the site of those cities of the plain which God's fiery judgments had blotted out,—a town which had itself once been miraculously destroyed, and concerning which a curse had been pronounced on the man who should attempt to rebuild it. Of all the Jewish cities, it was the one on which God's condemnation rested, and a significant type of this world, in which the curse has been festering ever since Adam's expulsion from Eden. God then said to Him, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;" and to this day we still see and feel what was then spoken. But even to this city of the curse Jesus of Nazareth comes, with ears open to

the cries of the helpless, and with ample power and ready will to relieve, bless, and save.

Nor was His presence there unheralded or unexplained. Zaccheus learned of it, and climbed the sycamine tree to get a view of Him. There was a commotion which arrested the attention of the blind beggar by the wayside, and led him to inquire what it meant. There were also people to tell him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing. It was not a concealed nor hidden thing that this notable Personage had come to Jericho.

And so it is even to this present. He still presents himself to this Jericho. Wherever two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is, in the midst of them, able to save unto the uttermost. Nor is this presence without manifestations. There are stir and agitation enough to indicate it, and plenty to tell and explain the meaning.

A devout young woman was asked what the ringing of the church-bell every day at six o'clock meant. Her answer was, "It means that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." It was a truth, but one not always perceived or considered. No church-bell ever rings at its regular time, but to tell those who hear it that the blessed Jesus is at hand. The movement of every company going in or out of the place devoted to Christian worship, every sound of sacred song, every voice of prayer, every Gospel sermon, every call to devotion, every Christian assembly, tells that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. And a thousand things

in every one's experience, if only there is an ear to listen or a heart open to be impressed, utter and proclaim the same. Those solemn feelings in the chamber of death; those touching remembrances of a mother long since in heaven, of the little prayers she taught, and the heart-throbs and tears that came when standing in silence by her grave; those thoughts of God and eternity that press upon the soul in hours of sleepless loneliness; and those disturbing dreams of what is to be when this present life is over;—all betoken the mysterious presence of this Jesus of Nazareth meant to arrest attention and induce application for His saving power. And this day, this service, and these very words I am speaking; what are they, but notifications to you of the great truth told to the poor blind man at Jericho?

We cannot see this wonderful Personage, as he could not; but we can believe what is so credibly told us, as he did. "The goings of our God and King are in His sanctuary." Where His people are, and His Gospel sounds, there He is. And if any are not willing to believe it, it is their loss, and not the fault of those who explain and declare it to them; for He has come, and is here to bless.

When this poor man learned that Jesus was passing he felt that the supreme moment of his life had come. Realizing that He who had given sight to other blind, opened the ears of the deaf, loosed the tongues of the dumb, cleansed lepers, and even raised the dead was there, he could not

let the opportunity pass without crying out with all his might for a like deliverance from his infirmity. And the sublimest chance that can possibly come to ailing man is when Jesus comes to him and makes His divine presence known. The hour in which he learns of the Saviour's presence is the hour of his eternal salvation, if he will only seize upon and improve it,—*the time* in all the duration of his being for securing the highest boon of his existence.

There is often much to discourage prompt and energetic effort to avail one's self of the Saviour's presence, even when we know that He is passing. This world is no friend to grace. When we fain would cry for mercy there are plenty of voices and influences to urge us to desist and wait. There are unbelievers to say, Hold your peace; it is all delusion and folly. There are worldly wise to say, Hold your peace; you are only disgracing yourself. Depraved nature and carnal pride protest and say, Hold your peace, and don't sacrifice the joy of life for a heaven you know nothing about. Even some professed divines are ready with cautions against being righteous overmuch. And comrades and relatives sometimes frown and say, Hold your peace, and do not scandalize yourself and friends with such hysterical craziness.

Thus it was that many sought to silence this poor blind man's cries. "But he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." It was *his* matter, not theirs; and he had too much at stake to be turned from the great and

only opportunity of his life. And if any would truly profit by the presence of Jesus, they dare not heed such ill advice nor slacken in the earnestness of their prayers.

Greatly to our encouragement, however, we here behold the Saviour halting in His journey to give gracious answer to this beggar's cries. How different from the unfeeling multitude! What others deemed a nuisance He regarded with tender consideration. No sooner did He hear those cries than He stopped and had the suppliant brought to Him. How marvellous, that One so great, so famous, on so momentous a business, followed by all the country, eagerly waited for by multitudes at other points, and with the redemption of a world weighing on His soul, should suffer himself to be interrupted in His journey by the seeming impertinence and clamor of an insignificant mendicant! Ah, but people do not begin to understand the tenderness and charity of the heart of Jesus. The more miserable and helpless the souls that cry to Him the more ready is He to give ear. No matter what else may claim His attention, all must stop till those prayers are answered, and the needed relief given. "We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched by the feeling of our infirmities." And even amid the sublimities of His heavenly administrations there is nothing that more enlists Him than the prayers of needy souls that crave His mercy. Nay, He ever waiteth to be gracious. Men may doubt, and fear to approach Him, and think themselves too mean and

guilty to presume that He would consider such as they ; but it would be against His very nature to reject or disregard the guiltiest, meanest, and most unworthy sinner that humbly and earnestly calls upon His Name. O happy, happy we, to have such a Saviour on whom to call amid our ailments and distresses!

His heart is made of tenderness,
His soul is filled with love.

And what a blessed good fortune it is that this Jesus has come so near and within gracious hearing of our cries ! It means salvation come within our reach. It means the presence of divine power to open our blind eyes, to heal our ailing souls, to modify our sorrows, to give us light for darkness, to fill our mouths with joyous songs, and to give us place among the pilgrim hosts on their way to the heavenly Jerusalem. It means the King of glory at our very doors, ready to help and save whosoever in humble faith and earnestness applies to Him.

Dear friends, have you learned to appreciate the wonderful condescension of gracious Heaven ? Has it ever come to you to think of the transcendent opportunity divine goodness has thus vouchsafed ? Have you become at all awake to the momentousness of the presentations ? Do you at all realize the unspeakable favor to us poor sinful mortals contained in the great Gospel truth that "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by ?"

And what, then, have you done to avail your-

selves of His gracious presence?—*you*, whose lives have been so burdened with afflictions and trials?—*you*, who have so long felt your unreadiness to meet your righteous Judge?—*you*, who have spent so much of your time in worldliness, indifference, and sin?—*you*, who have had so many solemn admonitions of Providence, and on whose hearts and homes so many strokes have fallen to awaken you to a better life?—*you*, who have so often felt the degradations and punishments of a reckless and godless waywardness, and tasted the bitterness that comes from the service of lust and folly?—*you*, who have nothing to count on for a happy life when this world ceases to be your dwelling place?—*you*, who were so carefully brought up to proper living, yet have so deeply fallen from a faithful mother's teachings, and in spite of a mother's prayers and tears?—*you*, who have been intending, and promising, and waiting, while the years have glided away, and your heads are blossoming for the grave?—*you*, to whom the message has so frequently been declared "that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by? What have you done for the saving of your soul? Alas, how few there be to put up the cry for mercy while they may!

And now that we are approaching our annual Lenten services, the time has come when we may say, "that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." There is a stir that tells of His nearness. And if any one is in real earnest to secure His merciful help, this is the opportune time for setting about it. Other such seasons have come and gone, and left

many just where they were before ; shall it be so again with those who have never yet done anything to have place in the Saviour's company? When Jesus thus passed through Jericho it was the last time. He never returned to that place again. And so there must come a last time for sinful souls to possess themselves of His salvation.

Let me then emphasize the truth, "that *Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.*" He is now at hand; but, "passing by," means departure as well as presence. He is on His journey to Jerusalem, and will not long be within the reach of those who most need His help. The procession is moving, and soon will be beyond those who neglect to call upon Him. When it gets beyond Jericho, it will be too late for its blind and destitute inhabitants to make their cries heard by Him who alone can help them. And how will they then blame and distress themselves that they were so negligent!

Now, therefore, is the accepted time; there may never come another. *Now*, while "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by," is the day of salvation. And if this incident has anything to teach and impress, it is the supreme importance of prompt and energetic effort to secure the Saviour's merciful attention and gracious help *now*, while the chance is here.

God help us all to take in the lesson, and to profit by it!

The Lenten Call.

Ash Wednesday.

Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—MATT. 11 : 18.



ANY look upon the season of Lent as a time to impose burdens on the flesh, and observe it in that spirit, or disregard it for that reason. Some starve and afflict their bodies, and load themselves with onerous tasks, hoping thus to recommend themselves to the divine favor, or to satisfy for their past failures and misdeeds. But the true idea is rather to help us lay off our burdens, to lift us out of our depressions, and to minister to our peace. Lent commemorates a long fast and a sore conflict on the part of our blessed Saviour, but not so much to have us imitate His experience as to have us see the cost of our redemption, and gratefully appreciate that costly purchase by intensifying our devotion and coming to Him for deliverance and rest.

There be many weary and heavy-laden souls. There are millions on this fair earth, whose burdens, pains, and heartaches God only knows. Some suffer in one way, others in other ways.

We cannot open our eyes without seeing the evidences and signs of care, anxiety, unrest, and distress. Even the sunniest life has its dark days. From all sections of the world, and from all classes, the cry comes: "O where shall rest be found—rest for the weary soul?" And one great office of the Gospel is to direct and lead such oppressed and longing spirits to the only source of true relief.

The central voice of the Gospel is articulated in the word of Jesus given in the text: "*Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"

This tells us that there is rest in Jesus, and that it is His prerogative to impart it. He hath purchased it by His fasting, toils, tears, and blood. He is enthroned at the right hand of eternal majesty to give it to all those who seek it at His hands. And to bring, offer, and bestow it upon the troubled and sorrowing, He has constituted His ministers and Church, and sent forth His word to all people.

He does not propose instant and entire release from all cares, trials, and afflictions incident to this present life. Ours is an adverse and perturbed world; and in our passage through it we must encounter many trying and often painful vicissitudes. Indeed, this necessarily belongs to our discipline and preparation for the proper appreciation and enjoyment of His rest.

Neither does He propose to benumb our sensibilities, so as not to feel the poignancy of sorrow

and trial. The rest offered is not the rest of a stone, nor of a corpse. A Christian is as much alive to the hardships and burdens of life as any one.

Nor is it proposed to exempt us from effort, toil, and labor. Man was made for activity. The sentence requiring of us to get our bread in the sweat of our faces is as much a mercy as a curse. Leisure, idleness, and nothing to do is not rest, but the breeder of *ennui*, discontent, mischief, and unhappiness.

Nor is the proposed rest the immediate and total suppression and eradication of the vexatious workings of indwelling evil. The best of Christians here carry with them a corrupt and tainted nature. Paul had been in the third heaven; but when he came back he still found a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, which much distressed him by its power.

What, then, is the Rest which Our Saviour offers to the weary and heavy laden?

The greatest burden that ever fell, or can fall, upon man is the burden of sin, and God's condemnation on account of it. And the first and greatest element of rest in Jesus is release from the impossible task of giving satisfaction for our many defects and faults, or of working out a righteousness of our own in which to stand justified before God. There lives not a man nor woman, if moral sensibility has not been wholly obliterated, who is not conscious of having done many

wrong things, or does not feel that something must be done to placate the just wrath of offended Heaven. It is the common cry of guilty man: "Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" What have men not done to propitiate the Almighty!—What pilgrimages, sacrifices, payments, offerings, and mutilations of the poor body,—what endless ritualistic doings,—ascetic tortures, vows, resolves, and oathbound abjurations,—what torments of life and being,—and all without avail! O the burdensome weariness of man in trying to be just with God! And such despairing and heavy laden souls, above all, we are commissioned to invite to rest in Jesus. *He* is "the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." What no works of man, no doings or renderings within our power, can ever accomplish, *He* hath taken upon himself to do and fulfill for us, quenching divine condemnation with His blood, and consecrating through His flesh a way for us into the holiest. Having made Him our Refuge, condemnation is gone, sin is forgiven, and we are free from all that the law may have wherewith to hold us under its penalties.

Yes, ill-deserving as we are, and much as we have provoked the wrath of righteous Heaven,

Jesus has made peace through His cross, laid down His own life to pay the forfeit of ours, procured for us the favor of God, and now invites us to come and receive from Him the blessed rest from the impossible task of saving ourselves.

And with this comes the further rest of heart and mind amid the cares and troubles of this brief life;—not exemption *from them*, but composure and patience *in them*. Accepted in Christ as God's dear children, and with His unfailing promises to see us through in safety, there remains no doubt that we shall come out all the more profited by what we suffer here. He who clothes the lilies of the field, which neither toil nor spin, and feeds the little birds, which neither sow nor reap, will not fail to clothe and feed those whom He hath purchased at so great a cost. Caring for us more than a mother careth for her babe, we may be sure that all He sends, or withholds, or permits, is for our greater ultimate good,—overruled by His gracious hand for our benefit. And herein is true and blessed rest, even in the midst of earth's hardest trials and sorest afflictions. Let the days bring forth their worst, we can still say with Paul: Dying, yet, behold, we live; chastened, yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, yet possessing all things.

And along with this is rest from all tormenting fear of death. Timid nature shrinks from the contemplation of the tomb. But Christ has overcome death, robbed it of its sting, and transformed

it into a peaceful and sweet repose from earthly anxieties, pains, and weaknesses. It is a great privilege to live and labor for Christ; but to depart and be with Him is far better. To the child of God death is a friendly messenger, bringing much more gain than privation. The darkness, to earthly vision, may seem chilly and deep; but it is only a temporary shadow. As the waters of Jordan rolled back when the priests' feet touched them, and let Israel cross in triumph; so it will be with believers when called to cross this mysterious river of death. And in the calm of this assurance Jesus invites us to rest.

But all this is only preliminary to an immortal rest beyond this present world. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." By the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we are begotten again to a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved for us in heaven; a hope that is an anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast. And what a peace-giving comfort is this to our weary and heavy-laden spirits!

O glorious rest! O blest abode!
We shall be near and like our God!

This, then, may serve to indicate the rest which Jesus offers and pledges to those who come to Him.

And how it exalts Him above everything to be

found on earth, that He should have it in His power to propose to do such mighty things! Who can give peace to a troubled soul? Yet, He makes this claim, and engages to fulfill what He proposes. He does not say, "I will *show* you rest," or, "I will *tell* you of rest." An ordinary herald might do that. The word is, "*I will give you rest.*" He claims that it is in His power and province to give it; that He has the unquestionable right to give it; and that it is His will and purpose to give it. How sublime the presentation! What a basis for the confirmation of our faith in Jesus! He who has the power, the right, and the gracious will to make such proposal and promise, may be trusted to do what He says; for He thus shows himself to be the invincible Christ, the omnific Son of God.

And for the impartation of all this blessedness His only conditions are that we come to Him for it. There is no limit to His invitation. All that labor and are heavy laden are invited; and all they have to do is *to come*.

Nor is there any long and tedious journey to be performed. He is here. Wherever His word sounds, He is in waiting to be gracious.

No laborious preparation is required. The thief on the cross, within a few hours of his death, could make an effectual application, and find admission into Paradise. All the fitness we require is to feel our need of Him. The simple matter is *to come*.

Of course, this means belief that He is, and

that He is the true Saviour, able and willing to save all who come. Of course, it means an earnest looking unto Him as our only hope and help, the lifting to Him of the suppliant eye, the breathing to Him the penitential prayer, and the sending out of the heart to lay hold on Him and His word of promise. We are indeed weak, unworthy, inapt, and helpless; but that is no barrier. The more we feel our want the more tender and urgent His invitations are; and His Spirit is ever with His word to help our infirmities and to further our prayers. The sick and wasted child, stricken with death and speechless, can still cast an imploring look into the face of its watching mother; and so may we, even from our deepest extremities, look to Jesus and be saved.

Dear friends, these are precious Gospel truths,—truths upon which hang the only abiding peace of burdened souls,—truths which it is a happiness to be privileged to declare,—truths which we should all rejoice in and eagerly embrace. What, indeed, could be more worthy of welcome to sinners such as we?

Are you sorrowful, then, sick of soul, and laden with unhappiness? Is your heart heavy and sad over blasted hopes, or a life wasted in folly? Have you found it a weariness to live, your way overclouded, your heart ready to despair? This Lenten Season brings a word for you. It is the word of Jesus. He speaks it to you. His heart yearns to comfort and help you. And His word to you is, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

Have you been a backslider—an unfaithful servant—a truant from the school of Christ? Has the world allured you from your sacred vows, and silenced your devotions? Have you made a wreck of your once joyful faith, and drifted away from God, and church, and piety? Is your soul burdened with the sad retrospect? And would you really find forgiveness and restoration? Look to the merciful Jesus. His word is to you: "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."


Or, are you of those who have till now been neglectful of God and indifferent to the things that make for eternal peace? Has Mammon, pleasure, vanity, been your God, monopolizing your worship, absorbing your powers, wasting your energies, and destroying your life? Do you realize how much of a sinner you are, without God and without hope in the world, unable to think of death and eternity without painful misgivings? And is it your honest wish to find shelter and peace for your neglected and needy soul when God shall call you hence? *Look to Jesus.* His word is to you: "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

Thus, then, the message is delivered. God help the hearers of it to take it to their hearts, that they may not fail of the rest that is in Jesus!

Satanic Siftings.

First Sunday in Lent.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.—LUKE 22:31, 32.

OME people are pleased to make a jest of Satan, and do not believe there is a Devil. Even Christian believers do not always sufficiently consider how much they are exposed to the malignant and treacherous wiles and instigations of this evil spirit. The Gospel for to-day speaks of him as a subtle tempter, who even assaulted the holy Christ and sought to destroy Him; and here the Saviour tells of his desire to compass the ruin of the Apostle Peter. It was this evil being who beguiled our first parents, and brought sin into the world, with all its mischiefs. The Bible represents him as a murderer, a liar, and the primal source of all wickedness and untruth. He it is who interferes with the effect of the divine word on men's hearts, who sows tares among the wheat,—who takes on the garb of an angel of light to mislead, deceive, and destroy. And quite a different world

ours would be, if it were not for the doings of this foul enemy of all good.

In the text the Saviour tells of his desiring and asking to have Peter in his power, especially on account of his prominence and bold professions, that he might try and test him.

It was thus that he desired to have Job, because that venerable patriarch was esteemed "a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil." The motive was purely malicious, meaning to put these men to the test, to buffet and try them, claiming that their piety was selfish or hypocritical, and would soon give way if subjected to his rigid sifting.

And a most dangerous foe he is, because of his great intelligence, subtlety, and might. He is an archangel fallen, a leader of revolt that depopulated a part of heaven, a dark and unseen spirit, the head of an empire of evil spirits, having direct access to our minds and hearts, and capable of affecting us from without and from within. The mass of the world's population is more or less under his dominion and control, and he is largely potent in all its history and elements. He has allies in the depravity that lurks in our own nature, and can readily stir up evil thoughts and passions, as well as foment sore temptations from without. There is scarcely an agency or motive by which men are moved which he cannot use to turn souls from God and righteousness.

He is indeed under bonds. He could not touch Job without divine permission, and was obliged

to stop where God commanded him to stop. He had to ask consent to sift Peter. And the Lord Almighty could easily make an utter end of him, as He one day will. But, in the present stage of the divine economies, Satan is allowed to exercise his subtle and malicious power, though in measure curbed, that those who are so minded may, by divine grace, resist and overcome him.

Candidates for favors need to be tested, that they may prove their fitness to receive them. Untried virtue is always uncertain. People must be made to show what they really are, in order to righteous promotion. And as we are called by the Gospel to very exalted dignities and honors, it is but just that our faith and devotion should be put to the test to prove our fidelity and dutifulness. Though the danger is that some will utterly fail, it is due to those who have in them the grace and strength of steadfastness to have the chance to show the fact.

Besides, there are many fruitful vines which need purging in order to full fruitfulness. There are husks, and chaff, and light grains, and noxious seeds, mingled with the best of wheat, which only close and trying sifting and winnowing can remove. Trials are not an unmitigated misfortune. Even temporary failures under trial may be the means of correcting errors, helping the good, and strengthening steadfastness. Sore temptation, though for the time it may sadly shake and cloud the Christian's integrity, is often the very best thing that can happen to him. The sifting of

Peter, which resulted in his melancholy fall, cured him of his overweening self-conceit, and by the grace and prayers of Jesus made of him a better man and a more efficient apostle. And hence St. James says: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life."

And for these siftings and trials of believers, compelling them to watch, and fight, and struggle to maintain their spiritual standing, God gives a certain liberty to these infernal powers to exert their malignity. They mean it for ruin; but He permits and overrules it for good. But for the sore trials that Satan was permitted to inflict upon Job there could have been no such illustrious demonstration of his integrity. We never could have known the full strength of Abraham's faith had it not been put to so severe a test. Paul was the happier and the stronger apostle from the buffetings of Satan; they drove him the closer to his Lord. Nor would the saints be as saintly on earth, or as highly exalted in heaven, were it not for these very assaults, siftings, and temptations with which Satan is permitted to ply them. Jesus was "*led up of the Spirit* to be tempted of the devil," that He might conquer, and prove His immaculate spiritual fitness to become the Redeemer of the world. And the Saviour did not interfere to keep Peter from falling into the hands of Satan to be sifted and tried, but only prayed that his faith might not fail.

Dear friends, it is not possible for any of us to

escape temptations and trials. It lies in the condition of our nature, of the world we live in, and in the economy of God, for us to contend with evil, and to face the risk of being vanquished by it. Our faith and devotion must be tried and proven, in order to our promotion with the glorified. As followers of Christ, we must needs wrestle, not only with flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against world-lords of darkness, against spiritual hosts of wickedness that infest the very atmosphere we breathe. Even when by the grace of God, as pictured of St. George, we succeed in getting the dragon beneath our feet, he still lives, and the conflict with him is not ended so long as we are in this world.

Fortunately, we are not left to ourselves when the hour of trial comes. Though we cannot escape Satan's assaults and sifting, heavenly forces are not wanting to aid us in the conflict. Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail. His sympathy and His intercessions went with His servant in the impending trial, and it availed for His disciple's help. Just how it applied we cannot describe; but it was there, and it was effective. The trial came with sudden violence where it was not at all suspected. Though forewarned, the over-confident disciple was taken by surprise, and quickly found himself steeped in sin and shame. But it was only a temporary fall. It was permitted to prove to him his weakness and the folly of his bold self-conceit; but it did not destroy his faith in the Lord whom in his weakness

he so profanely denied. He immediately saw and realized his sin, and was profoundly humiliated. His soul was wrung with anguish for the wickedness into which he was betrayed ; and with untold bitterness he bewailed and lamented it. Clouds dense and oppressive were upon him. But he still loved and believed in Jesus, fearing only that Jesus might now abandon him. His repentance was quick and genuine. Humbled by his sore experience, Jesus did not cast him off, for He never casts off a penitent soul ; and Peter was all the wiser and better from the terrible sifting Satan had given him. The trial was sharp and sudden, and for the time disastrous ; but he came out of it the gainer.

Great is the power of Satan, and strong is the hold he has upon us by reason of the evil that is in us. We cannot escape his cruel and dangerous assaults. But we have a precious ally and intercessor in Jesus. His heart and tender sympathy go with us in our trials. Having himself suffered, being tempted, He is able also to succor them that are tempted. Having overcome in the dreadful conflict, He is the more concerned and the better qualified to help us in ours. He is anxious for His people when in peril. He prayed for Peter, and He prays for us. He does not pray that no trials may come to us ; but that when they come we may have strength to bear them. And a blessed consolation it is that while we are agonizing in the furnace of trial, Christ is agonizing in prayer that we may come through in safety.

The prayers of Jesus avail much, but they avail only for those who hold on to their faith. There is no victory without faith; and for people to give up and abandon their Christian faith is to lose all help. Jesus had prayed for Judas too; but Judas had parted with his faith and sold himself to the enemies of his Lord, and the day of his temptation was his destruction. Of all things, when trials come, the great matter is to hold on to our faith. We may sometimes be disposed to think it is useless to try further,—that there is no good in prayer or hoping in Christ,—that we may as well give up first as last. And this is exactly the state of mind to which Satan would bring us. Having destroyed our faith, he knows that our ruin is sure. But though we have failed never so sadly, we must not yield our faith in Jesus. He is still our loving and pitying Saviour, and to His mercy we still must cling, and come back in humble penitence to trust and confide in Him.

What Christ most desires in us is faith. Everything depends upon our faith. We are justified by faith. The victory that overcometh the world is our faith. All the assaults of Satan cannot result in our ruin so long as we hold on to our faith. Though we be thrown into the deep waters, faith is the rope that still connects us with the shore. And the great anxiety and prayer of Jesus is that, amid the trials and siftings to which we are subjected in this world, our faith fail not. Confiding in Him we are safe, however weak. Though we many times trip and fall, we shall not

be utterly cast down. And through Him that loved us, and gave himself for us, we shall still make the heavenly port, and have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our adorable Lord and Saviour.

In the hour of trial,
Jesus, plead for me;
Lest by base denial
I depart from Thee.
When Thou see'st me waver
With a look recall,
Nor for fear or favor
Suffer me to fall.

The Supreme Enquiry.

Second Sunday in Lent.

Dost thou believe on the Son of God?—JNO. 9:35.



ORIGINALLY, this striking question was addressed to a poor blind beggar at Jerusalem. The particulars concerning him form one of the most remarkable and instructive narratives in the New Testament. I can only say now that at the time he was asked this question he was the subject of a wonderful mercy and of a very outrageous wrong. Blind from his birth, the gracious Saviour noticed him, and miraculously gave him his sight. This started a popular commotion and controversy leading to official investigations, all concerning the character of Christ. As in most such cases, there was much bad blood, and neither party was able to convince or satisfy the other. At length the man himself was called, questioned, and badgered on the subject; but his testimony was so clear, and his argument so conclusive, that the enemies of Christ were intensely angered, fell foul of the poor man, denounced him as an apostate, and excommunicated him from the synagogue. "They cast him out."

Honest witnessing to the truth sometimes brings into trouble; but when called to speak, nothing will excuse silence nor the least prevarication. The sympathies of Jesus are always with those who suffer for the truth's sake, and He will not fail to favor and bless them, as shown in the case of this man.

When it came to the Saviour's ears that the poor man had been so unjustly treated, He sought him and asked him the question of the text. It was not in censure, but in the tenderest of loving compassion, that the question was asked. It was meant to open the way for augmented blessing. As the Jewish officials had cast him out of their fellowship, this question was put as a gracious preliminary to his admission into a heavenly citizenship. He had never before heard of "the Son of God," and therefore could not at once answer. But he asked, "Who is the Lord, that I might believe on Him?" Opportunity was thus created, as in the case of the woman of Samaria, to make the saving revelation. "And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen Him, and He it is that talketh with thee." It was enough. Evangelic light broke in upon his soul, as the light of day had come into his darkened eyeballs. "And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him."

And now, in a like spirit, and for a like reason, this question comes to every one, "*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*"

It certainly is a question of very great impor-

tance. Christ himself is the author of it, and He never speaks trifles, nor deals in matters of indifference. It is, indeed, one of the deepest, broadest, and most vital questions that can be asked. More hangs upon it than on any other that can engage the human mind. There are many other important questions,—questions of science, government, social order, education, commerce, hygiene, and the like,—but none to compare in value and significance with this. Matters of the very highest moment, and the furthest reaching in extent, are involved in it. It is the question upon the answer to which each one's eternal destiny must turn. It is a question respecting *Faith*, without which it is impossible to please God, and without which there is no eternal life for any of us.

The question is also intensely personal. It was originally spoken to one individual. Faith and salvation concern each soul individually. The question is not what bodies of people entertain, what parents or friends believe, or what the Church to which we belong confesses; for no community, parent, or Church can believe for us any more than they can eat or sleep for us. We must each believe for ourselves,—each man for himself, and each woman for herself, just as each is held separately accountable to God. The wording is in the singular, “Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God?” and the matter cannot be turned over for some one else to answer in our place. It is Christ's address to each separate soul,—His word to you and me.

The question also is very specific. It says nothing about pedigree or past history, whether good or bad. Nor is it simply whether we believe in a God. Many do that who do not at all believe that He ever had a Son, or that Christ is the only begotten of the Father. Nor is the question whether we are religiously inclined; for people may be given to devotional services and belong to churches, and still not believe on the Son of God. The pagans of Athens were "very religious;" but they called Paul a babblers, and ridiculed the story of Jesus and the resurrection. Jews, Mahomedans, and zealots of other systems often put Christians to shame by their strictness in their several religions; yet do not at all believe in Jesus as the Son of God. Some who even profess and call themselves Christians make it a point to repudiate and deny that Jesus is the Son of God in any other sense than as an exalted and highly endowed creature; while others, who find no reason to doubt what the Scriptures say of Him, still give themselves so little concern about it as to be in no condition to say whether they believe on the Son of God or not.

It was said to this man, that seeing and hearing Jesus was seeing and hearing the Son of God. This was spoken in the sense of the common orthodox creed. So the man certainly understood it; for he at once set himself to *worship* Christ, who instantly took place in his heart and mind as a Divine-human Being—God manifest in the flesh—his Divine and worshipful Redeemer and

Lord. And this is the definite and specific matter of faith covered by the Saviour's question ;—this, and nothing else.

It is, furthermore, a question to which every one is expected to give an affirmative answer. This was expected from the man to whom it was first addressed, although he was not yet in full condition to answer it. The very asking was to prepare and help him to the answer. It is for the purpose of begetting and developing such faith and trust in Jesus that all His words and presentations are vouchsafed. He was born and lived in our world, and taught, and wrought, and suffered, and sent forth His witnesses, and has given His Spirit, that men might learn to know and believe in Him, the same as did this poor beggar. It is therefore expected of all hearers of the Gospel to believe, confess, and trust in Jesus as the Christ, which is the sublimest of all privileges within human reach. And if we do not come to such belief and hope in Him, ours is the fault and the loss.

It is further implied in the original asking of this question that it involves no great difficulty. Faith, even saving faith, is a very simple thing. Here was a man, blind from his birth, an uneducated man, a man of very limited opportunities and small attainments, a poor beggar, living on alms ; yet he was expected to believe, and he did believe, and believe effectually, and could tell that he believed. Believing, indeed, is one of the commonest acts of life. We have faith in men,—

faith in the government,—faith in institutions and enterprises to which we entrust our means,—faith in methods of conveyance to which we commit our lives,—faith in what friends and reliable people tell us,—faith to act in things without any certain assurance of what the result may be ; and scarcely a step in life do we take except on some kind of faith. We cannot move without it. And believing on the Son of God is in easy accord with our nature and our everyday habit. It is trust, confidence, reliance on what we regard as trustworthy and true ; only that it is directed to Christ, and takes in what is testified of His greatness, love, and power to save.

Embarking on a ship to cross the sea is a simple act ; but it is an act of faith. It means confidence in the strength of the vessel, in the capacity of the captain, in the existence of a further shore, and in all the arrangements for a successful voyage ;—such confidence that we willingly let go of the land, launch out upon the trackless ocean, and commit ourselves without fear to the craft that is to carry us over. Believing on the Son of God is an act of the same sort, equally simple, and, with the helps and assurances God has given, equally easy. In the one case there is no need for us to study shipbuilding, navigation, and astronomy before we adventure. That has been done better than any of us can do it, and can avail for us whether we understand it or not. And so, in the other case, it is needless first to acquaint ourselves with all the profundities of theology, and to mas-

ter all the mysteries of the economy of grace. That has all been thought out and arranged with infallible wisdom. Our part is simply to surrender ourselves wholly to Christ, and to the plan of God for saving men, and trust to Him to bring us to the desired haven. And when we thus give ourselves, confidently and adoringly into our great Captain's hands, willing to sail and be governed by His commands, we believe on the Son of God, and have the faith unto salvation.

And yet faith in itself cannot save. It only links us to what can; that is, to the all-sufficient Saviour. Faith is not the ship; but the gangway by which we enter the ship. It is not the sun; but the eye that perceives the light and makes it of service to direct the walk. It is not the treasure; but the hand that takes and appropriates it. It is not salvation; but it is the stepping aboard of what is arranged to land us in heaven.

And where this faith exists it is bound to show itself. In the case of this poor man, what his heart felt his mouth spoke. His belief he confessed; and according to his belief he acted. He worshipped his Saviour. There may be orthodoxy in the head which does not affect the heart nor influence the life; but "faith without works is dead." True faith is a living principle, which moves the soul and speaks out in all manner of spiritual utterance and activity. Belief on the Son of God responds to His question, confesses His Name, and adoringly submits to His will. This is as natural and certain as that a sun shines,

a fire burns, or a fountain flows. Dreams, tokens, and sudden impulses, as well as a lifeless creed, are nothing worth apart from these practical demonstrations of a living faith. And we can know whether we are thus affected, moved, influenced, and controlled with reference to our Lord and Saviour, as well as we can know that we are alive, or that we devote ourselves to anything else.

As to the degree and strength of our faith, that is another matter. Faith has its degrees. It is sometimes weak and sometimes strong, even in the same individual. The question is not as to the amount of our faith, or as to a steady and unclouded assurance; but whether we embrace and hold to Christ as our divine Lord and Saviour, ready and willing to do and suffer as He may direct and appoint. This is believing on the Son of God, and this is what is contemplated in the inquiry of the text.

The great question, then, comes directly and personally to each hearer, "Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God?" And there can be but one answer, Yes or No. If it cannot honestly be Yes, it is No. God means and desires that it should be Yes in every case; and blessed are they who can truly say, "Lord, I believe," with the same confidence of this poor man. It was a world of consolation and happiness to him, and it is the same for every soul so taught and helped by the Spirit. Even feeble faith, which can say no more than, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbe-

lief," is full of promise and joyful hope, and, if devoutly nourished, will not fail to bring the soul into touch with Jesus and His salvation. But those who cannot so answer have the most momentous matter of their lives yet to be attended to. And surely this question of the Saviour should make them think about it, and start them on the great work of seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Dear friends, some of you are in the morning freshness of your lives. This then is your most favorable time to be about this important business. The word of the Master is, "They that seek me early shall find me." While the heart and memory are receptive, the affections warm, the thronging cares and troubles of life yet few and distant, and the soul not yet set in its habits, is of all time the best and most hopeful for learning to love and believe in Jesus. O let it not be wasted in wilfull neglect!

Some of you have passed the meridian of your day. You are therefore verging on a time when you will most need the consolations of a mature Christian faith, and when the absence of it will be to you a sore privation. So long a life with no Saviour in it! So near eternity, and no preparation for it! So blest with opportunities, and all neglected! So helpless and unpardoned without Christ, and yet no faith to assure the soul of His saving mercies! This is a condition so deplorable that we should think it impossible for a rational man or woman to risk it. Do you then

believe on the Son of God? If not, your chance is rapidly passing away.

For all of us, like for this man, Jesus has done great things. You put great value on the liberty, the civilization, the intelligence, the beneficent laws, and the many other blessings and advantages which distinguish the country in which you live. But these all are traceable to Christ. They are from the spirit infused into mankind by His teachings and religion. Things were not always so, and are not so where Christianity has had no sway. Even the wicked and most indifferent among us are thus reaping vast benefits which Jesus, by the planting and influence of His Kingdom, has conferred. And how unreasonable and ungrateful that there should be so little asking after Him, so little reverence for His Name, so little care to please Him, so little faith in One who is the source of all the good we enjoy, or ever can enjoy.

O careless, prayerless, and unbelieving children of His gracious providence! Be admonished, and see to it that ye believe on the Son of God.

Heavenly Sympathy.

Third Sunday in Lent.

I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.—LUKE 15 : 10.



HIS text stands like a cut diamond among gems. It is so full of light on every side that one cannot look at it without being struck with its peculiar brilliancy. A distinguished English preacher has expressed his doubts whether the whole compass of holy writ affords a text of intenser brightness or more touching interest.

First of all, it introduces us to the most exalted orders of created beings,—to those elder sons in the great family of God who sprang from His creative power before our world was made,—to seraphic principalities and powers, immortal spirits, princely lights, ever burning sons of glory, that make up the equipage of Eternal Majesty.

Next, it tells of gladness and rejoicing on the part of these celestial orders. They sang and shouted when the world was made. They lighted and cheered the plains of Bethlehem with their glory and their chantings when the Christ was born. John in vision saw and heard them filling

immensity with their mighty Halleluias at the great consummation. But here was quite another matter; not the creation of a world nor the birth of a Saviour, but only the repentance of a poor, sinful man. And yet, these sublime intelligences rejoice over it. What then must be the significance and worth of one man's penitence that it renders heaven jubilant?

In order to enter somewhat into the meaning of this presentation, let us consider *what a sinner is*.

This is not always understood and weighed as it should be. When we speak of sinners we are apt to have before our minds only the lowest, most degraded, and least worthy of all the human family. Talk of sinners, and we think of none but the most repulsive of our race, the pests and outcasts of society, who hardly deserve to live. But this is a very crude way of looking at the matter.

What is a sinner? Whatever else may be said of him, he is a being created in the image of God;—a soul framed for communion with heaven and endowed with capacities for development into eternal life and blessedness;—a living creature, meant to shine in splendors of intelligence and glory when stars have faded, and capable of growth and progress in Godwardness without limit or end;—an offspring of Deity, concerning whose creation there was counselling among the eternal Powers, and it was said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Furthermore, a sinner is this sublimely capacitated creature seduced from rectitude, betrayed into sin, involved in guilt, made a slave to evil, and brought under penalty of death temporal and eternal. A sinner is like a star of the morning overtaken with calamity, eclipsed, humiliated, cast down into depths of shame and condemnation, and on the way to become a total wreck.

What is a sinner? He is this noble creation, captured and in helpless bondage, yet considered in heaven, pitied of God, and made the object of a plan of mercy and salvation which the angels desired to look into;—a plan of mercy and salvation which included the incarnation, life, teachings, sufferings, death, resurrection, and heavenly administrations of the Son of God. The sinner here is a humiliated, damaged, benighted, ailing convict, disinherited of his primal estate, exiled from Paradise, tossing amid the vicissitudes, trials, and perturbations of a world on which the curse has fallen; but not yet abandoned to the desolations and horrors of eternal doom. For him and his deliverance there are still unspeakable anxiety, interest, and activity, both in heaven and on earth. Christ at the head of all power, a Providence in its course, the Spirit of God in manifold operations, angels in their varied ministrations, holy men and ministries of God in this world,—all are in ceaseless effort to recover perishing man to life, holiness, and eternal salvation.

From this, then, we may form some idea of who and what a sinner is.

Let us consider next *what the Repentance of a sinner is*; for this is the particular subject of the angelic joy of which the Saviour speaks.

The meaning of the word "repentance" covers a change of mind, a change of heart, and a change of life. It implies a thorough awakening to the deplorable condition induced by sin, and to the guilt and condemnation it has incurred. It implies compunction, alarm, and distress on account of these, and dread of deserved and impending wrath. It signifies a looking back with painful regret upon the past life of alienation from God, and the ill-bartering away of the soul for the vanities and pursuits of the carnal and unsanctified. It means earnest and honest turning from the old careless, prayerless, and sinful way of living to accept the forgiveness proffered through Christ, and to obey, follow, and honor Him as our gracious Lord and Redeemer. It is the effectual shining into the soul of the illuminating and moving Spirit of God through the Law and the Gospel, awakening a sense of danger and guilty need, creating an appreciation of the unspeakable goodness and grace of the heavenly Father, and begetting a willing, grateful, and persevering purpose and effort to live to His honor and praise.

What, then, is a repentant sinner? It is an alien, benighted, and damaged soul, by God's grace recovering from its delusion, insanity, and sad captivity to lust, self, and Satan. It is a noble creation of divine wisdom and goodness being extricated from the jaws of eternal ruin.

It is the rebel and apostate being restored to the estate of loyal citizenship and reconsecration,—the long-demented one being clothed once more in his right mind. It is the guilty and wretched prodigal brought back to his injured but loving Father's home. It is the lost child found,—the dead one rebegotten to proper life,—the imperilled soul reborn into the blessed family of heaven.

From this we may begin to see why there would likely be "joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Angels are happy and dutiful subjects of Jehovah, and concerned most of all about what relates to the honor and glory of His Name and Kingdom. They are beings full of tender benevolence toward the deluded, distressed, and helpless; and they cannot but be gladdened by the snatching of souls from the eternal burnings.

The angels are everywhere represented as intensely interested in the divine plan of grace, watching its development and progress and pleased with every instance of its success; and every repentant sinner is to them a forepledge of the great triumph,—an immortal jewel won for the crown of their Lord.

Angels know the connection between repentance and spiritual life,—between the changes in the heart and standing of a true penitent and the glorious immunities of the Kingdom of God,—between the awakening, turning, and submission of a sinner and the eternal blessedness; and in every instance of the one they behold a blessed

earnest of the other. How can they be otherwise than joyous over every sinner that repenteth? And the practical proof of their joy is given in this, that they are all ministering spirits, doing manifold and willing service to those who thus become heirs of salvation.

But now let us consider further, *The purpose for which our Saviour made this particular statement.*

From the context it is plain that it was given in answer to the accusation made against Him by the captious Jews. They denounced Him as a bad man because He received sinners and ate with them; and this was part of His answer to that charge. And a just and very complete answer it was. Were not the holy angels good? And if it is a matter of joy to them when even "one sinner" repents, why should He be blamed and regarded as profane for welcoming these poor despairing outcasts, who came flocking to Him, eager to hear His gracious words, behold His merciful works, and share His saving goodness?

But it was further meant as an argument to convict and shame these heartless malignants. It was as much as to say to them: "If God's holy angels rejoice over one repenting sinner, what unheavenly creatures are ye to condemn My kindness to these burdened souls so anxious to be taught the way to eternal life." It was the citation of a heavenly truth which not only vindicated His conduct as embodying the very spirit of heaven, but revealed the base unclarity of their

hearts and the shameful injustice of their hostility.

It is not worth while for men to undertake to fault the Christ, nor to reason out a case to convict Him of a mistaken goodness; for they are sure to get the worst of it.

It was also intended by this citation to show the heavenly dignity of the work of bringing sinners to repentance. It may seem foolish to the philosophy of this world to lay so much stress on the preaching and the efforts made to win careless sinners to Christ and salvation; but it is a work in the spirit of angels and in the spirit of Jesus,—a work which gladdens heaven by every item of its success.

Much is made in this world of advancement in knowledge, art, commerce, and civil liberty,—of the glory of wise statesmanship, the honoring of heroes, and the upbuilding of empires. But these are not the things that most enlist the contemplations and sympathies of angels. According to our sublimest Guide and only Saviour, the bringing of a single soul to genuine repentance is a greater achievement, and more delights heaven, than all any worldly savant, statesman, or philosopher ever accomplished or can accomplish. Earth's heroes and sages may for the time gladden nations here; but he who succeeds in winning a sinner to God gladdens heaven and eternity.

Nay, still more was this citation meant to assure us, and all burdened and guilty souls, how ready and willing Jesus is to receive sinners. It

really proclaims Him the special friend of the sinful, ailing, and needy, who seek His favor. It re-echoed as well as vindicated His word: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He knows what sin is,—what corrosions it begets in the heart,—what an evil thing and bitter it is to depart from God and righteousness,—what utter hopelessness obscures the outlook of the guilty without His redeeming mercy,—and hence it is His pleasure, and the delight of angels, when even one of these alien and sorrowing ones is brought to repentance.

See, then, dear friends, what wonderful interest is felt for us sinful mortals, even in the highest worlds. All heaven is concerned and anxious to have every one of us turned from our sins,—our unbelief,—our neglect of God,—our prayerlessness,—our indifference to the great and pressing wants of our souls. The everlasting Father in His goodness and mercy, the everlasting Son in His unceasing love and compassion, the eternal Spirit in His ever-gracious ministrations, and the holy angels in anxious sympathy, are profoundly concerned for us. And the toiling Church, in untiring activities of instruction, admonition, entreaty, prayer, and every variety of endeavor, is moved by the one great and absorbing wish to have us turned from the evil that is in and about us to Him who alone can save. Nor can we thoughtfully contemplate the facts without feel-

ing that here is matter so momentous in significance that it is supremest madness and supremest crime for any one to disregard it.

O ye prayerless neglectors of your souls and your God, regarding your own selfish ease and pleasure more than to be in accord with heaven and participant in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Is there nothing in all this to make you think upon your careless ways? It is now, by divine grace, within your power to make the holy angels glad and to secure a destiny the equal of theirs. Your own earnest and heartfelt repentance out of your negligence and unconcern will do it. And why not imitate the prodigal as he came to himself, and say, "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son?" Saying and doing this, with a good and honest heart, you will send a thrill of joy through celestial orders, and put you on the way to become like them. And now is your time.

God help us all to be genuine penitents!

The Munificent Saviour.

Fourth Sunday in Lent.

When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?—JNO. 6 : 5.



THE first thing I note in this text is *a great crowd of people greatly interested in Jesus*. He had just come from a severe conflict with the captious and malignant Jews, and had retired with His disciples into a desert place to "rest awhile." But His movements were watched, and the people from the towns and villages along the shores of the sea of Galilee joined each other in a general movement to follow Him into His retreat. About five thousand men were in the crowd, jostling each other in their hurry and press to come where He was, that they might see and hear Him.

Some, doubtless, were moved by mere idle curiosity, or by the general stir. The community always abounds with people ready to run and gape whenever something unusual occurs, although seldom profited by what they learn. Having seen and told their story, they are ready for the next new sensation. Some people can hardly live ex-

cept in some sort of excitement, for which they are prompt to sacrifice everything.

But, in general, this crowd of people was not of that empty and idle-minded class. More serious considerations were moving them. The preaching of John the Baptizer had made a deep impression on the whole nation, and awakened an anxious looking for that illustrious Messiah and Judge whose coming and presence he had so positively announced. Many had also come to the belief or suspicion that this Jesus was that very One of whom John and all the prophets had spoken. His words, works, and wonders had deepened this feeling and produced a general stir on the subject. And when He was known to be in the vicinity the community around, almost as one man, arose and sought to make its way to Him.

Nor can I otherwise than admire and commend these people for their zealous interest in Jesus. He was altogether worthy of their profound attention, as of that of all that live. He was the most marvellous and wonderful Being that had ever appeared in human flesh and blood, the greatest teacher, preacher, and wonder-worker that ever set foot upon earth. And why should not they, as all men, be profoundly interested in One who spake as never man spake, who had power to heal their sick and raise their dead, and who showed by all His acts that He had come forth from God, and had upon Him the favor of God? Another character, so unique, so preëminently

worthy of attention, or that so supremely challenges the regard and study of rational man, had not before been shown in our world. And all history since their day has set the seal of wisdom and right on the zeal of these people to see and hear this marvellous Personage. It was the Wonder of the ages that attracted them. His life and career present a problem of momentous import, the proper solution of which involves the deepest interests and the highest possibilities of the whole human race. No just philosophy nor system of human thinking can afford to pass Him by. Nor has there ever been a solid explanation of the facts concerning Him, except that which was so reverently confessed by Peter, when he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" — "Thou hast the words of eternal life."

What better, worthier, or wiser thing, then, could these people have done, when opportunity presented, than sacrifice convenience and all other claims to use their chance to meet, and see, and hear this great and glorious Messiah of God? The wonder is rather that so many who know of Him, whence He came, and for what He lives and reigns, give themselves so little concern about Him. O the unwisdom of neglecting the Christ!

A second thing I note in the text is, *the interest of Christ in those interested in Him*. He once said, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out;" and here was a marked exemplification of that saying. If at any time He

might reasonably seclude himself, it was at this time. He had gone into remote retirement, worn, wearied, and seeking a little rest; but He interposed no barricades against intrusive approaches. He gave no orders to His disciples to warn away the invading multitude. He showed no unwillingness or reluctance to receive all that might come. Nay, when this crowd of eager seekers were yet at a distance from Him He lifted up His eyes upon them, thought of their wants, and began to prepare for their entertainment.

And so He is ever ready to receive all who come unto Him. His interest and sympathy go out toward those who are interested in Him. When yet afar off, His attention is enlisted and His eyes are lifted upon them. He sees and knows what is going on in their hearts; what desires and estimates are moving them; what hindrances they have to overcome; and is already concerned about their comfort and peace. Retirement and rest are nothing to Him, when perishing souls are hungering and thirsting for light and salvation. Had He consulted His own repose, He would have remained in the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, and never taken upon Him the humiliation, burdens, and woes required for the working out of our salvation. But it was His love for man that moved Him. He was in the world thus to minister. He came to seek and to save that which was lost; and it was not in Him to deny himself to any earnest

comers, whatever needed rest as a man He might have to forego.

Yes, dear friend, the eyes of Jesus are lifted and open toward you, even in your most hidden thoughts about your soul's salvation. That secret anxiety in your hours of solitude,—those sighs of spirit over the question of what is to become of you when done with this world,—those longings for surer knowledge and greater nearness to God and the only Saviour,—those inward promptings to try to be a better man or a better woman,—those frequent wishes that you were a Christian, and struggles with self and circumstances about becoming one,—those disturbing doubts and fears, unbreathed to men, as you were made to think of death and eternity,—those little attempts at prayer, and occasional resolves and promises to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,—and all those conflicting and unsettled feelings working often in your breast,—He understands full well. His Spirit has created them, and He has been looking all the while for the outcome of full surrender to Him. That reflection on the unsatisfactoriness of your past,—that slightly quickened attention to the preached word, while half afraid that it will demand more than suits your wishes,—that timid doubtfulness and dread which have held you back when thinking to come to a final decision,—that hesitating consent to take the step which yet is not taken,—all has been under the interested eyes of Jesus, as He looks forth to welcome you to His presence and

favor. Yea, His great heart yearns over every awakened and anxious soul. He is interested in those who are in any way interested in Him.

A third particular I note from the text is, *that great good comes to those who come to Christ*. Before this great company reached Him, and from the moment He saw them coming, He began to speak and arrange for their comfort. What He said to Philip had nothing directly to do with the provision made; but it showed that the Saviour was concerned about the matter, and already had in mind what He meant to do. He received them kindly; He preached to them; and He wrought one of His greatest and most convincing miracles for their benefit. They saw the Lord; they heard His words; and they each had satisfying proof of His beneficent kindness and creative power. They were given plentiful provision for their bodies, and joyous nutriment for their souls. Nor is there any thing else with so much promise in it as coming to the Lord Jesus.

A compassionate Preserver of His people is Jesus. He careth for their bodily life and comfort as well as for their spiritual wants. In this case He took a small barley loaf into His hand and broke it; and it enlarged in the breaking, and became sufficient to feed a thousand men seated and waiting to receive it. The whole multitude were thus served and filled. This showed that the hand of Jesus had in it all the fecundity of the earth, and all the excellence of power by

which our harvests are produced and our bread supplied. And while He thus fed their bodies, He was at the same time feeding their faith and filling them with a double benediction. Their hunger was satisfied; and their hearts were convinced. They said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." Yea, so overwhelming was the glad demonstration that they were determined to crown Him on the spot, whether He would or no.

But He had better things for them, which had to be wrought out in a different way. They had debts to the law, which they could not pay; and sins to be cancelled, which required the shedding of His blood; and a way to heaven needed to be opened for them, which could only be by His resurrection and celestial enthronement. Accordingly, He avoided the outburst of their patriotic enthusiasm that He might procure for them a higher blessedness.

Our salvation requires more than an earthly king, however great or wonderful His power. We need a spiritual Saviour—a propitiation for our sins, a righteous advocate with the Father, and a heavenly Lord to minister repentance, remission of sins, and life everlasting. Hence while moved with tenderest interest for our earthly comfort and welfare, Jesus refused that earthly crowning that He might be to us "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

And that world to come, of which He spoke so much,—that realm into which He as the Fore-

runner hath entered,—that better country, and heavenly, to which the pious in all the ages have aspired,—that inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away,—those crowns that never dim, and powers that never decay, and pleasures that never pall, and glories which no earthly language can describe,—that home of the good, where they live and reign with their God and Redeemer, and all tears are dried, and death and sorrow and pain never come,—all these, and more than human thought can compass, the adorable Jesus hath in reserve for them that come to Him.

And yet another thing I note in the text is, *the wise example set by these people*. Jesus was in their neighborhood. They knew not how long He would remain, nor whether He would ever return after He should leave. This was, therefore, their golden opportunity to see, and hear, and satisfy themselves with regard to this wonderful man. And they energetically seized upon their opportunity.

Nor does our situation differ much from theirs. The Christ has come. Report of Him has gone abroad assuring us of His nearness. He is within the reach of every one. It is now in our power to find Him. Our opportunity is here. How long it may last no one can tell. If we would come to the Saviour, the present is our chance. To-morrow may be too late. Consultation of our own ease may bring loss that never can be retrieved. And our truest wisdom in the case is to imitate

the conduct of these Galilean people, act with vigor while we can, seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near. Otherwise we risk eternal failure.

If there were any other hope for us, the matter would not be so urgent; but everything depends on Jesus, and our coming to Him. Allowing Him to go unsought, we neglect the sublimest privilege that can ever come to mortal man, and impose a sad privation on ourselves, and a loss for which nothing can compensate. This, then, is our time for action. Another such a time we may never have.

Dear friends, these truths are not unfamiliar to your ears. You have been hearing of this wondrous Son of Man, His gracious doings and saving offices, from your earliest recollection. And the very familiarity of the presentations may have dulled and deadened your interest in them. Many tire of what they call the humdrum of the faithful pulpit. But, let me say to you, one and all, that nothing worthier of your devoutest attention and most earnest solicitude ever came to your ears. Many kings and righteous men have desired to see what ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear what ye hear, and have not heard them. And if the tidings of the nearness of the Saviour in all His compassion and saving greatness have thus far fallen dead upon your hearing, awakening no anxious desire for His favor, arousing no activity to profit by His presence and power; the time is here for you to break up your

dull indifference, and apply at once to Him who alone can give the bread of life, or save from an eternal starvation. Is it wise?—is it right?—is it not a thing of infinite blame and guilty stupidity—for any one to spend a lifetime serving vain fancies, and letting the only chance of salvation go? And of how many who are listening to me now has the blessed Jesus been obliged to say in sad complaint, “Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life.” Yet, to this present He tarries and waits to be gracious! O the folly and guilt of men! the goodness they slight! the mercies they disregard! the opportunities they set at naught!

The All-abailing Offering.

Fifth Sunday in Lent.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh : how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.—HEB. 9 : 13, 14.



WHEN called to deal with such a text as this a certain class of teachers begin by admonishing us very self-complacently to separate ourselves entirely from all theological systems, even of the most orthodox divines, and go directly to the great Shepherd himself. This sounds well; but is not so much from desire to bring out the true heart and essence of the Gospel, as to get rid of what does not agree with their preconceived notions. They would have us avoid orthodox systems, in order to make room for some system of their own which is not orthodox. Accordingly, instead of leading us, as they say, from stagnant and muddy pools of human tradition to the translucent river of more independent thought, they land us in the quagmires of an errant rationalism, where there is neither orthodoxy nor any genuine Gospel. And

if we are not to heed and believe the clear testimony of such inspired men as the Apostle Paul and the writer of this Epistle, we might as well cast our Bibles into the fire and make common cause with skeptics and infidels.

But not so readily can we consent to drop out of our holy faith what is everywhere so fully taught in the New Testament and so elaborately foreshadowed in the symbolism of the old—namely, that forgiveness of sins is only through the blood-shedding of Christ, and eternal life only through His atoning sacrifice. Nor need we go any further than the text before us to vindicate and justify the faith of all orthodox believers from the beginning until now.

First of all, we are here introduced to a very wonderful and worshipful Personage, whose proper dignity forbids His being ranked with dependent creatures. He is called "the Christ;" which means "The Anointed," as only priests and kings were anointed. Elsewhere in this Epistle He is described by the highest terms known to our language. He is spoken of as the Son of God; the heir of all things; the Maker of the worlds; the effulgence of the Father's glory; to whom the Father gives the name of God, as when "to the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." He is repeatedly called "The Lord," and is proclaimed to us as "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." And yet, with all, He is a true man. The word is that, "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also himself

took part of the same," and was "made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest." Yes, a true man, but verily a God-man. And this we get, not from the muddy ponds of human reasonings, but from the limpid stream of the divine Word, given by inspiration of God, out of which we will not suffer ourselves to be defrauded by the cunning craftiness of men nor by philosophy falsely so called.

Next, we are here certified of the great Gospel truth, that this wonderful God-man,—this Son of the Eternal in human flesh and blood,—voluntarily gave himself to a sacrificial death for our redemption.

There are people who have no place for this truth, although the words are plain as words can be. The invincible statement here is that this Christ, as our great High Priest, offered Himself without spot to God, as a sacrifice and payment to Eternal Majesty and justice for our sins, and to procure for us standing as accepted servants of the living God. In the first chapter of this Epistle it is written that "He by himself purged our sins." In the next chapter it is written that He "was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who were all their lifetime subject to bondage." So again in the lesson before us the word is, that "neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own

blood, He entered once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." And to this it is added, "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many;" that when He came into the world He said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God, by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all;" and that "by the blood of Jesus" we now have "liberty to enter into the Holiest by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through His flesh." And if this is not enough, take the declaration of the Saviour himself, where He says, "this is my body, which is broken for you . . . this is my blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Nothing of this is from human systems nor from man's lucubrations; but from the pure oracles of God, which everywhere give testimony to the doctrine of the vicarious and atoning death of Christ and salvation through His blood.

But we have here the still further assurance of the abundant efficacy of our Saviour's offering of himself. This is strongly brought out by comparison and contrast with the old ceremonial observances, which were not mere empty rites. They were efficacious to the ends for which they were intended. Although they were "carnal ordinances, imposed until the time of reformation," they were divinely appointed. They were "figures for the time then present,"—types of better things to come. Of themselves they "could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertain-

ing to the conscience;" but they did serve for ceremonial and bodily purification. Nay, they had in them something of spiritual profit also; for the promises of God were connected with them. Worthless apart from what they typified, they yet had a divine consecration to a purpose which they did not fail to subserve. And so, with an invincible logic, the writer here argues, if these observances availed,—“If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God?”

Here is an admeasurement of the efficacy of Christ's atonement which is completely overwhelming. How shall we figure it out? There was important virtue in the old Levitical sacrifices, though offered by men who had first to offer sacrifice for their own sins, before they could offer for the sins of the people; but here the High Priest “is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” The one was a carnal administration in an earthly and perishable tabernacle; but the other a spiritual and heavenly, in “a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands.” Aaron's sons offered by material fire; Christ, “by the eternal Spirit.” The old sacrifices had to be repeated year by year, for the same need ever recurred; but Christ “by one offering hath per-

fectured for ever them that are sanctified." The ancient priests offered the blood of brute beasts; but Christ "offered himself,"—"His own blood,"—with which He "entered into heaven itself." What are bulls and goats in comparison with the coequal and coeternal Son of God, so much better than angels, and the very effulgence of the Father's glory? O the depth and force of this argument! How can words reach or minds measure the superior efficacy thus ascribed to the sacrifice of Jesus?

But there is another way of looking at it. We have here a specific statement of what Christ's offering to God through the eternal Spirit was meant to do, and truly does for man.

"The blood of Christ," in Scripture language, stands for His whole offering in our behalf,—the crown of all His obedience and endurance for our sake; and it is here said to "purge the conscience." Conscience is the umpire which charges sin and guilt upon the soul, quite disabling any free approach to God or any acceptable divine service. Hence, the purging or purifying of the conscience can be nothing less than the doing away with the condemnation due to sin, and the cleansing of the soul from its pollution. Both justification and sanctification are necessarily included; and both are thus unequivocally ascribed to the atoning sacrifice of Christ as the procuring cause. Apart from that sacrifice, all works on our part are mere "dead works," which cannot answer for our past guilt, nor recommend us to

God. Everywhere the word is, that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin;" and if His blood does this, nothing else does it. And this it does first by adequate expiation and atonement, as represented by "the blood of bulls and of goats;" and then by a continued process of personal sanctification, as represented by the sprinkling of the ashes of an heifer to purify the ceremonially unclean.

Great and wonderful are the virtues and effects thus ascribed to the blood of Christ. It blots out all our transgressions, so that we stand as innocent, and no longer condemned before the Law. It puts us in condition to render acceptable service to God. It opens for us a new and living way into the very Holy of holies. It gives us liberty to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." And it gives motion, impulse, and encouragement to "draw near with a true heart," purifying ourselves even as He is pure.

Just how "the blood of Christ" operates to bring about these sublime and wonderful results, we may not be able in all respects to explain as earthly science may demand. The matters involved are so heavenly and beyond our power to trace their action and relations that they are necessarily mysterious. We cannot trace the whence or whither of the wind, much less the things of the Spirit of God. But it is not necessary that we should be able fully to comprehend or scientifically construe such divine transactions. Our

business is to accept, believe, and rest on God's word, no matter whether we can adjust everything to our limited thinking or not. Bread will nourish us, though we know nothing of the processes of digestion. Medicine can relieve and cure, if we have the confidence to take it, although the manner of its action, and even the materials of which it is composed, may be beyond our knowledge or understanding. Many were healed by Christ's word, by the touch of His hand or His garment, or by clay made of His spittle, who never could explain the connection between the means and the cure. All they knew was, that virtue thus came out from Him which released them from their infirmities. And although the offering of the Saviour's blood may have mysteries which we cannot solve, that does not vitiate its reality or its saving virtue. Multitudes on multitudes are now in heaven, giving thanks to Him who "redeemed them to God by His blood," who lived and died in simple faith and trust in what the inspired Word declares, without knowing or troubling about the dynamics of the atonement or its mysterious forensic relations. It was enough for them to know, believe, and experience that "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God," and not the dead works of man, can purge the conscience and help to develop a grateful, childlike, and acceptable service of the living God. In this was their joy and their salvation. Nor are we in need of anything more to give us peace in believing

and joy in the Holy Ghost. Simple faith in the Word will do the business.

What use, then, dear friends, have you been making of these transcendent and most vital truths? Do you believe them? Are you resting your soul and grounding your hope upon them? Are they to you the real heart and core of the Gospel you have accepted? Or are you among those who higggle at them, and doubt, and say you can't believe them, because unable to adjust them to your alleged understanding? I pity the people who cannot believe "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," or who doubt that the Sinless One was ever "made sin for us, that we might be the righteousness of God in Him." I pity those who think the ways of eternal Deity must be gauged, and his word revised and corrected, according to the taper light of their erring judgment. I pity them that they can find it in their hearts to tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing. I pity them for their non-acceptance of our adorable and only Mediator, and their refusal to accept "redemption through His blood." I pity them, because they "enter not by the door into the sheepfold," but think to "climb up some other way." God have mercy upon their hesitancy and unbelief, and turn their hearts to the only saving truth!

But these great truths may be mentally honored without affecting the soul or the life. There is such a thing as holding the truth in unrighteous-

ness. People may have a historical faith in Christ without realizing the overwhelming greatness of His love, or feeling the need of His atonement, or cleaving to His cross for forgiveness and heaven. Let it not be so with us. We believe in God; let us believe also in Jesus,—in the worshipful divinity of His person, in the sublime sufficiency of His mediation, in His perfect competency to “save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.” We believe that Christ died for our sins, and rose again for our justification; and let this be a vivid and ever-living reality to our souls, that we may feel the vastness of our obligation to His goodness and show the fruits of our faith in our service of the living God.

The Mounted King.

Palm Sunday.

Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass. —MATT. 21 : 5.



FOR the first time in His earthly history our Saviour here assumed the character of a King,—very humble indeed, but still a King,—a triumphing Hero and Ruler. He commands both men and beasts. He rides as a King. The multitudes hail Him as a King. Ancient prediction pointing to the occasion designated Him as Israel's King. And as a conquering King has been His career through the world ever since.

Whatever men may think or say of Christ, or in whatever way they may try to dispose of His story, He is, and has been thus far, the greatest and most powerful personality in history, the centre of the mightiest and divinest forces that ever penetrated the spirit or ruled the thinking and activities of man, the potent source of the grandest moral, civilizing, and beneficent influences that ever affected the condition and career of our race. Even the coldest critics confess to a won-

derful fascination and commanding power in the presentations He makes; and the most daring free thinkers, in spite of their unbelief, have again and again shown a beautiful reverence for His character and moral sublimity.

In the instance before us Jesus is mounted. For the only time in His life He rides. Everything around Him is in boisterous commotion. He is entering a city filled with enemies. He is riding to His death. But He holds on His way as if all were calm and peaceful, and as undaunted as if the way were as open to Him as that of a star in the emptiness of space. And such has been His progress through time. Amid all the perturbations and revolutions of nations and ages He has simply ridden on in His meek majesty, nothing daunted by obstacles,—nothing doubting that the sovereignty of the world is His.

Ever greater than the Church He founded,—greater than any movement within it,—greater than the greatest agents called into being for its service; He has never wavered, never faltered, never failed. Through all the long history of the Church; through all its fevers, conflicts, and depressions; through all the defections within and antagonisms from without: He has stood as the invincible standard for the rallying of His people, “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”

Great and many have been the impediments thrown in His way. The great heart of perverted humanity, in the full tide of its power, has been against Him as against everything divine. Its

lust, and pride, and selfishness, and hatred of responsibility has ever been in some sort marshalled to retard His progress. But on He rode, and on He still rides, and on He will ride till every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

Fickle and false have been many of His professed friends. Again and again has He been wounded by those of His own house. There have been generations of Judases to betray Him, of Peters to deny Him, and of disciples to desert Him. Often has He been sold for less and baser coin than thirty pieces of silver. But, with all, He still rode on, conquering and to conquer.

Ridicule, mockery, and blasphemy have assailed Him in every age. Vast crowds of doubters, and skeptics, and foes, great and small, have sallied forth to crush Him. His every claim has been questioned, criticized, denied, and tossed hither and thither with wildest freedom and unbelief, His miracles denied or explained away, His teachings spurned, His Cross and Passion reduced to mere example or the result of mistaken ambition, His glorious Resurrection and Ascension denounced as silly fables, artfully palmed upon the world. And yet, on He rode, and on He still rides, and on He will ride, till all His enemies are put beneath his feet.

His progress in the past is pledge of His victorious progress in the future. Having conquered on so many fields, transforming fiercest enemies into willing allies, He is bound to ride on in tri-

umph to the end. A distinguished bishop has lately said, "I tremble not with others at the breaking down in the present day of the ancient barriers erected against ungodliness, and the out-rush of waters of strife and unbelief and doubt; for I know that all this is an old story worn threadbare in the telling—a phase of opposition that in varied shape has occurred again and again, and will occur to the very end. But this I know, that no antagonism, however fierce or fatal, can crush out Christ. The fire of man's hatred cannot burn Him; the floods of man's strife cannot drown Him; the sword of man's wrath cannot pierce Him; the bitterness of man's tongue cannot injure Him; the wild vagaries of man's brain cannot weaken Him; because He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Almighty." Amid all antagonizing crowds and questionings milleniums fall behind Him, and no old foes revived, nor new ones springing up, can ever stay Him. On, on, He rides to-day, and will ride on, till He who lived, and died, and rose again, is hailed invincible Conqueror.

It was in the midst of an exulting crowd that the royal Hero rode into Jerusalem. With many it was a mere sentimental enthusiasm, which departed with the day; but with others it was the utterance of deep, genuine, and adoring conviction. They saw in that mounted Hero the realization of some of their most solemn beliefs and most eager expectations. They beheld in Him a Messenger from heaven, even the triumphing

"Seed of the woman," the long-promised King of Israel. They believed in Him as their glorious Redeemer. They hailed Him with acclaim as the blessed Son of David, come in the Name of the Lord. And their exulting spirits turned to Him as the needle to the magnet, uttering song so true and genuine that if suppressed the very stones would have cried out.

Jesus presented himself to them as the King of Salvation, and they joyfully and obediently accepted Him. They fell in line to follow Him, and found in Him that great Messiah "of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." And by the honest faith with which they thus embraced Him, from fishermen and taxgatherers they were transformed into the illustrious princes of His realm, lifted to apostolic thrones, and given a spiritual regency in a sublimer state than Plato ever imagined or Solon ever dreamed. Moved and sustained in their untiring activities by their faith in Him and by the quickening powers of His Word and Spirit, no poet or philosopher, warrior or statesmen, of the ancient world, ever did as much as they to create and nurture the better, higher, and more lasting elements of human virtue, civilization, and liberty. And while this world stands, neither poetry nor prose, eloquence nor song, will ever get done with the devout celebration of "the glorious company of the Apostles."

Nor has this King of Zion, in His ride through the centuries, ever failed to have a like following,

who rank with the noblest of their day and generation, and numbers of whom have left a blessed impress on the world. Think of the Clements, the Chrysostoms, the Augustines, the Luthers, and a whole catalogue of mighty men of God, whose names the Church treasures among her choicest jewels, and whose inspiration, strength, and greatness came from their following of this meekly mounted Hero. A very zone of blessed light and joyous song has thus been pushing its way around this old earth of ours by means of the example, testimony, and ministrations of those to whom it was given to sing Hosanna to this Son of David.

And it is for us, dear friends, to be among that joyful company, and to share a like blessedness. We too can make contribution to the glory of the King, and to the volume of happy song that ever attends His march. To this end He comes to us again in this solemn season of grace. The Almighty lifts up His finger and says to us, "Behold!"—"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee." Not with our natural eyes can we behold Him. Not as man paints royal majesty and beauty is He to be seen. Meek and humble is the manner of His approach. He comes not as a sombre Judge with sword and executioners; but in plain Records and easy Sacraments,—a Prince of Peace,—a merciful and compassionate Redeemer. He comes, not to condemn and punish for our undutifulness and sins, but to pardon and release us through the merit of His cross, and

to bring us with songs and gladness into the heavenly Jerusalem.

How then are we to become a part of that great and joyous procession extending through so many ages and so many lands, from Judea even to the ends of the earth?

First of all, we must recognize in Jesus our divine Lord and Saviour. It is under this conviction and belief that the whole procession moves. Its leadership, its centre, its joy, its inspiration, is "He who cometh in the Name of the Lord." And until we learn to know, appreciate, and honor Him as the meek and glorious King of Salvation, our place is not in that happy company.

Furthermore, our hearts must be attuned to the excellent song of these people. Zacharias led off in it when he said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David." The aged Simeon re-echoed it when he sang, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." Mary voiced it, saying, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." Paul struck the grand keynote of it when He exclaimed, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And all the myriad hosts gathering around the sacred altar have never ceased to sing it, as with angels, and archangels,


and all the company of heaven, they praised and magnified the glorious Name of the Eternal, saying, "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord." And only as we learn that song, and keep it living in our hearts and on our tongues, are we of that blessed company, moving with the King to live and reign with Him in the City of God.

How is it then with you, dear friends? Have you learned to recognize and honor your rightful King and only Saviour? There be professed Christians who make more of a brutal ball-game than of a divine sacrament. Is that a following of Jesus? There are people who are louder and heartier in their praises and laudations of victors in trials of muscle and carnal contests than over Him who conquered death and hell and opened for them the Kingdom of heaven. Is this a following of Jesus? O the follies and hallucinations of people who fain would count themselves the children of God! But to all the meek and forbearing King comes once more, offering to be their Saviour and everlasting friend. He comes with free forgiveness and eternal life for every one who will receive Him. Open then your hearts and homes that He may enter. Receive Him, that He may cast out all alien powers, and become your everlasting Lord and Benefactor. And blessing, and honor, and glory be unto Him, both now and for ever! Amen.

Voices from the Cross.

Good Friday.

When they came to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him.—LUKE 18: 33.

OOD Friday brings before us the blessed Jesus, faint and weary under the weight of His cross, on the way to be nailed to it, and to die upon it. He trod that dolorous way that we might have hope and consolation in our journey to our death. And on that cross He hung with arms outstretched to shelter a world of perishing souls.

Seven times He spoke while hanging there. Those seven words form the Pleiades in the constellations of our faith, whose "sweet influences" no one can ever bind or destroy.

As the nails were being driven, or as the lifted cross was dropped into its socket with the suffering Saviour hanging upon it, He spoke and said, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*" It was not complaint, threatening, nor lament. It was a *prayer*,—not for himself, but for His cruel murderers,—for all His crucifiers, and so for us also, since our sins helped to drive those nails. How precious to know that we have

a Saviour so merciful in His intercessions and so ready to forgive even His crucifiers !

But there were others crucified with Him. Two notorious malefactors are His companions in the affecting exhibit, the one on His right, the other on His left. By word and gesture, from rulers and rabble, much cruel mockery and reviling were hurled at Him as He hung upon the cross ; and these two wicked men at first took part in it. But the heart of one of them soon softened, and he began to take the Saviour's part. Having learned of the promised Christ as King, he called Him "Lord" even in those agonies, and prayed Him to be remembered when He should come into His Kingdom. Here was belated penitence and faith ; but it was genuine ; and the gracious answer came from the suffering Saviour, "*Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.*"

It was a blessed assurance to a wicked man in the last extremity ; and it set up a monument of mercy to guilty penitents which has thrilled and comforted the hearts of myriads in all the ages since. And what a demonstration of the Saviour's divine power ! that, dying like a helpless mortal, He could open the gates of Paradise to a believing suppliant ! In such a Saviour we may well trust.

Beneath that cross stood His heartbroken mother, with other sorrowing women. In company with them was the Apostle John. And when Jesus saw her, and "the disciple whom Jesus loved," standing by, He spoke again, and

said, "*Woman, behold thy son!*" meaning John; and to John, "*Behold thy mother!*"

His first word was a word of intercession for the guilty; His second was a word of mercy and promise to a believing penitent; and His third was a word of filial tenderness and sympathy. As Christians, we have a spiritual mother, of which Mary was the representative. The same was also the mother of Jesus; for He was born of the Church, "like unto His brethren!" And the dearest object of His love and sympathizing care is that "mother of us all." From His cross He made richest provision for this oft-sorrowing mother for all the period of her earthly life. With His dying words He committed that mother to our loving care. It was His last will and testament as a man that He thus gave to John to execute; and it is His last will and testament to us as our Lord and Redeemer to care for, nurture, and protect the Church, from which we have our spiritual birth.

And now the mystery of His Passion verged toward its close. The hour had come for the final payment of the price of human redemption. Nature grew dusky, black, and fearfully ominous. The jeering crowds dispersed in terror. The voice of taunt and mockery subsided into solemn awe. In silence, amid the blackness of a sunless day, the Saviour hung, wrestling with His agonies. And as the flaming wrath due to a race of sinners struck into His soul, He cried, with an awful cry: "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani—My*

God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me !'' What all that betokened only He who uttered it can ever know. It seemed like a cry of utter despair ; and yet it was not utter despair. It told of the dreadful experience of the Son of God as the hell of horrors due to our sins was emptied upon Him. Thought and reason are stunned and stupefied as we contemplate the mountain weight of agony expressed.

And yet there comes from it the confirmation of the prophet's words, that His soul was made an offering for sin. Surely, here was adequate payment of our debt. And how, indeed, can any penitent sinner ever be lost for whom such a price has been paid !—in whose behalf such a sacrifice has been offered !

But, with these burning fires drinking up His soul, His long-continued anguish, His losses of blood, His fevers of pain, and His parched body, the blessed Saviour spoke again. "Knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, He saith, '*I thirst.*'"

There is no keener bodily anguish than great thirst, and the suffering Saviour felt it to the full. Beginning with His bloody sweat in the garden, there had been a continuous drain upon all the moisture of His system with never a draught to cool His tongue. In His long and awful inward wrestling with the demands of justice the anguish of His body seemed lost ; but now that He had touched the bottom of His atoning grief and

reached the further side of His great spiritual conflict, the tortures of His physical condition asserted themselves.

It was first a thirst for moisture for His fevered body ; but that was not all. It was also a thirst for God, who had so withdrawn himself. And it was furthermore a thirst for the consummation of those consolatory results for which He gave Himself to these horrors. It was not a prayer,—not an appeal to God, nor to those watching by His cross. It was simply the utterance of a condition of torture and distress. Sour drink was put to His lips, and the light of the Father's favor again began to dawn upon Him ; but the thirst for the fruits of "the travail of His soul" continued, and still continues. It was a thirst for us to thirst for Him, and find redemption through His blood. Nor can we better refresh the Saviour's soul than by coming to Him to drink salvation, so dearly purchased and now so freely offered.

And yet again He spoke. Having tasted the coarse draught put to His lips, He said, "*It is finished.*" There is often a sudden waking up of energy in the dying ; and so it was in the dying Jesus. With a greater and louder voice, He uttered these words. There was a tone of triumph in them, though spoken out of the very article of death. What did they mean ?

Many momentous things had been written by the prophets respecting these mysterious occurrences. Many momentous things were made his-

tory by them. And many momentous things, stretching through time and eternity, there took their start. And these words set His seal upon them as now virtually accomplished. "*Finished*" was all that was written, foreshadowed, and decreed, concerning the humiliation of the Christ. "*Finished*" was all that the law required for the opening of the doors of salvation for a guilty race. "*Finished*" was everything for the evolution of His holy Church, the new creation, and the reign of eternal righteousness. Wide was the glance of the dying Jesus summed up in those brief words. From the covenant with the Father before the world was—from the first promise down through all that the prophets had spoken—from the depths of His awful experiences up to the eternal glories to come of them—all was taken in, and the great *Amen* affixed.

And with this ending of His earthly life there remained but one more word to be said. And that word was, "*Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.*" He went upon the cross speaking the Father's Name, and He there ended life with that Name upon His lips. Obedient unto death, He could confidently commit His soul into that Father's hands, as the believing and faithful ever may. A vanishing instant of unconsciousness, and He awoke among the blessed, to rest in Paradise till the Easter morning dawned.

And so it is now appointed for all who trust to His gracious mediation. Serving Him while living, we shall go to Him when dying. And


under the "sweet influences" of these seven stars, that shine so serenely from our Saviour's cross, may we ever live, and have grace to carry us safely through this chilly night of time to the Paradise of God.

It is not death to die—
To leave this weary road,
And 'midst the brotherhood on high,
To be at home with God.

Easter.

The Day of Gladness.

This is the day which the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it.—Ps. 118 : 24.

 HE Saviour of the world was dead. He had spoken His last word from the Cross. He had given up the Ghost. His body lay cold and lifeless in the sepulchre.

A few believing women had gathered some fragrant spices, and, as soon as they dared, hastened to that sepulchre at the early dawn to do honor to His remains. They came, thinking only of their loss, hoping only to get one more look upon the gracious countenance of the friend they so much loved.

They came; but they found nothing as they expected. The heavy stone, which they feared would defeat their purpose, was rolled away. The sepulchre was open and empty. Their Lord was not there. Had He been stolen? or what? Ah, the power of God was there before them. The course of nature had been disturbed. Bonds were severed which never before were broken. Angels of glory were there. Voices from the other world were heard. The women were almost

paralyzed with dread. The truth was, that a momentous miracle had been wrought. A mighty wonder had come to pass. An angel of God announced it, saying, "Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: *He is risen!*" And that return of the Lord Jesus from the tomb is what gave being to our Easter Day, "the day which the Lord hath made."

Since the world began, there never was another day like it. No other day ever made such a change in the hopes of man. No other day ever shed such blessed and enduring light over our benighted world. No other day of such sure and solid gladness to the dying children of men had ever dawned before. There had been numerous and joyous types of it;—as when righteous Noah looked forth upon the newly baptized world in which to live a happier and brighter life;—as when Abraham received back the Son of promise from under the doom of death;—as when Israel came up out of the Red Sea to sing the jubilant songs of an unexpected deliverance;—as when Jonah found himself once more in the land of the living. But these instances were all limited, temporary, and extended not beyond the present life. Easter Day brought deliverance, not for one person, one family, one people, or only for this life; but for all tribes of men, past, present, and to come, and stretching out through all eternity.

Easter Day was a glorious day to the first disciples; but it was not for them alone. When

they were gathered to their rest, others came to whom it was as great a joy. And it is the same to-day it ever was to any people. Even to us upon whom the ends of the world have come, it is still as truly and as much a thing of triumphant gladness as to any who lived before us. Ages have not deadened its light, nor diminished its joyousness or its glory. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, is still a potent and present fact, which can never lose its virtue or significance. It is a perpetual and never-failing spring of hope and strength to every generation of believers.

We know something of the force and meaning of what Easter Day has been and still is to the Church of God. We know how everything in our Christian faith and hopes rests upon it. The word of inspiration has long since taught us that "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; and they also which have fallen asleep in Christ are perished!" We know the joyous stress which the Apostles and early Christians laid upon it,—the sublime courage and unfaltering persistence with which Paul preached it, clung to it, and rejoiced in it,—the exultant thankfulness of Peter for the abundant mercy of God vouchsafed by it,—the triumphing in it of the Church in all the ages.

In grateful exultation
Their notes let all things blend,
For Christ the Lord is risen,
Our joy that hath no end,

was the song of John of Damascus, which Christians have not ceased to sing even to this day.

Easter Day has given us our Christian Sunday. The original creation-work and God's restful contemplation of what He had made gave us the ancient Sabbath; and so the new creation, which broke from the tomb of Jesus on Easter Day, has given us the better light of our Christian Sunday, every recurrence of which is something of a little Easter Day—the Church's stand-up day.

Nor is it difficult to see and appreciate why the Church from the very beginning has ever made so much of Easter Day.

It was the day of illustrious vindication for the character, claims, and teachings of our Christ. While He lived He was denounced as a deceiver, His miracles ascribed to Satan, His professions condemned as blasphemy, and His body crucified, *because He said He was the Son of God*. Easter Day wiped out all these lying accusations, and declared Him "to be the Son of God with power."

Easter Day affixed the great seal of Heaven to the completeness and sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice. He had taken upon Him our nature, endured the privations, toils, and sufferings of human life, and surrendered himself to death, even the death of the cross, to fill for us the place of a second Adam, and by these means to buy back what the first Adam had forfeited and lost. It was as surety for guilty man, and with willing consent to pay all our debt to the violated law, that He submitted to that awful death, and came

under its dark dominion. Nor was it possible for Him ever to be released from those bonds without the rendering of full satisfaction to eternal Majesty and Justice. And when Easter Day showed him gloriously alive, it was the invincible demonstration from the eternal Throne that the debt of man was paid, justice satisfied, the law honored, and condemnation forever done away for every one that believeth.

Easter Day was the day of glorious victory for Christ over all His enemies. Up to that time they seemed to have everything their own way. For thirty pieces of silver they had secured His betrayal into their hands. Without a contest they had obtained His condemnation and Pilate's consent to have Him crucified. They nailed Him to the cross. They succeeded in killing Him, and in getting the seal and guard of state to secure His sepulchre. We can imagine the powers of darkness grinning to each other over the effectual end they had put to this Son of God, who had shown himself so great a menace to their kingdom. But Easter Day came upon them like a devastating cyclone, while the cross stood uplifted as the banner of the victorious Christ. Our Samson had awakened from His slumbers and carried off in triumph the very gates of death.

Easter Day was the effectual forepledge of a blessed resurrection to all believers. The dread sombreness of the reign of death it quite brushed away. It showed the bonds of Sheol broken, so that all our graves now lie open toward heaven.

That day gave us the sublime earnest of our immortality. What was accomplished by Christ, was accomplished for all that are His, and must ere long be accomplished in them. Having risen from the dead, He hath become the first fruits of them that slept. His resurrection guarantees the resurrection of all who die in Him, just as the first fruits prove and foreshow a general harvest of the same kind. Yes, these flowers and Easter jubilations, dim and perishable as they are, prelude a glorious morning, when angels of God shall throw open the tombs of all that sleep in Jesus; and from earth and sea the myriad hosts shall rise and shine in the splendors of their Master's likeness.

Easter Day is our sublimest illuminant of the invisible world. It gives us rays of light that extend beyond the tomb. It demonstrates that death is not an obliteration of our being, but only an incident in our history. It furnishes assurance that the great ones gone, the high souls passed from earth, and all the holy and beloved dead from our own hearths and homes, still live to God, happy in their rest and hopes, and only awaiting greater glory and nobler life in the unfolding of the great purposes of God. It proves to us that Paradise itself is only a vestibule to a nobler, higher, and eternal estate, into which Jesus our Forerunner has for us entered, and to which the resurrection is to bring His saints. It shows us our loving and dear Saviour full Master of the realms invisible, and Head over all things for the

glorification of His people. And in it we have outlooks into infinitudes of blessedness, and endless cycles of Godward expansion and supernal peace.

Nor need I stop to tell what an invincible fortress our Easter Day is to our beleaguered faith for further proof that this Day the Lord hath made for us to rejoice in and be glad.

Nor is Easter Day any less important now,—any less significant,—any way diminished in its joyousness, grace, and potency,—than when it first dawned upon the world. The Resurrection of Jesus is a thing of undying power. The Risen One is the very same to-day who spoke to Mary Magdalene, reproved the doubting Thomas, talked on the way to Emmaus, and broke bread on the shore of Gennesaret. All that could be said of Him then is true of Him still. What He did for His friends then He is as competent to do now. And all the gladness, rejoicing, glorying confidence, and conquering comfort, strength, and hope which Easter Day had then, may also be ours.

Only this must not be forgotten, that Easter Day is a call to a new and better life. Our glorying is not good, except as it tends to lift us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. We cannot truly keep the feast with the old leaven of malice and wickedness cleaving to our souls. Christ died and rose again that we might rise from the death of sin and cast off all the works of darkness. He did not take our place to make

us more secure in negligence and unbelief. He did not conquer death and triumph over it that we might yield ourselves the more freely to the corruptions and follies of a carnal life.

Easter Day is not for mere outward jubilation, but for the soul to cleave to Him who is the Resurrection and the Life; to confirm our faith in Him; to quicken us in His service; to animate us to unfaltering love and glad obedience.

Easter Day was meant to create new eagerness, as well as new hope, in a wasted and perishing world; to reinforce man's life and aims and energies for a new career; to inspire with ardor to reach that God-like stature which belongs to a candidate for a blessed immortality. And while we rejoice in Easter Day, let it be in deadness to sin and its allurements, and in joyous life to God through our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end.

Religious Certitude.

First Sunday after Easter.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.—HEB. 10 : 22.



ASSURANCE is the firm persuasion of the certainty of a thing. It may respect a matter of fact, a matter of belief, or a matter of hope. In the text it means a thorough persuasion that Christ is an all-sufficient Saviour, and that through what He has done and suffered for us we are now accepted as God's children and heirs of heaven.

It is a great thing to have such a believing confidence. So long as a matter like this hangs in dim uncertainty it is impossible to have solid spiritual peace. It is only when our souls are sure, and we can say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed and that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him," that we enter upon the proper life and joy of our faith.

Whether such assurance is to be taken as a part of faith, or as a degree of faith, or as only a consequence or fruit of faith, it still remains true that there must be some kind or degree of certainty in order to enter into the peace of believing.

It is important, however, to note the distinction between assurance about what Christ is and proposes, and our persausion that we certainly are among the saved. We may be satisfied and sure of all the great doctrines about Christ, and believe them without a doubt, and yet not be sure that we have personally embraced Him unto salvation. We may even truly believe in Him, and really belong to the number of the forgiven and saved, and yet not be sure of it in our own minds.

It is just here that much mischievous confusion often exists. Some say you must be entirely sure, and know for a certainty that you are saved, or else you are not saved. But this is very unfair and misleading. It tends to make over-confident self-deceivers on the one hand, and to dishearten and undo what may be genuine faith on the other. Hence we have people who are very sure that they are Christians, and seem to have no question that they will go direct to heaven when they leave this world, and yet have no real faith in Christ. Their religion is nothing but noisy emptiness, a flattering dream. They think themselves something, while they are nothing. So, again, there are many humble and timid children of God, who truly embrace Christ and His salvation, and have some dim hope that He will own them at the last, but would not dare to say they have no question or fear about their ultimate salvation.

It was the shrewd remark of an old clergyman, that when he got to heaven, if God in His mercy

should ever bring him there, he would find three great surprises: First, at not finding there some who were very sure of getting there; second, at finding there some who were afraid to hope for so great a mercy; and third, and the greatest of all, in finding himself there.

I would therefore have you note and mark this fact, that saving faith in Christ and personal assurance of our salvation are two different things. Faith in Christ as our Lord and Saviour is one thing; but faith *in our own faith* is another thing. The two may, should, and often do go together. When one truly believes in Christ he ought to know that he believes; but he may truly believe and still not be as confidently certain about it as he would like to be. The absence of full confidence in our own faith is a disability, a discomfort, and a hindrance to our spiritual peace and joy; but it does not necessarily argue the absence of saving faith, for there may be saving faith where there is no firm assurance of it.

The "Assurance of Faith" respects two things, about which we can and should be certain.

First, we can and should be sure about the object on which faith rests. We cannot be believers without believing something; and that something we must feel sure about in order to believe it, or we do not believe it. That on which faith rests is the word and promise of God in Christ. Here there can be no doubt nor misgiving, if we have faith at all. God's word is and must be true. His promises are yea and amen. If we cannot

rest on them, we cannot rest on anything. And if we do not take and believe them, we have no Gospel faith. Here then faith has assurance. Where it is in living power it must believe the word and promises of God. It belongs to the very essence of faith thus to take God at His word.

In the next place, taking the Gospel as true, we can know and be certain whether we take for *our* Saviour and hope that Saviour whom the Gospel offers. True faith makes the word and promise of God in Christ a real thing to us,—a thing on which we fix our trust, hope, and firmest calculations, for time and eternity. We may hesitate to take to ourselves the undoubting persuasion that we are and certainly shall be saved; but it cannot be because we cannot tell and be sure whether we believe God's word or not, or whether we take and rest on Christ as our Saviour, or not.

But while it belongs to faith to be sure and certain on these points, it is not to be overlooked that faith has its degrees. It has not the same clearness and strength in every one, nor in the same believer at all times. And in so far as assurance is a mere degree of faith it does not affect the existence or essence of faith. Faith may be sure that it rests on Christ, and yet be weak and timid in taking to itself all that is covenanted to one who so believes. This is what we may call *weak faith*; but though weak, it is real, and it justifies and saves, whether we are as sure and satisfied about it as we would like, or not. As one of our old theologians has properly said, "We

are justified by faith, not because it is a virtue so firm, robust, and perfect; but on account of the object in whom it rests; that is, because it apprehends and holds to Christ as the Saviour." It is not the strength and power of the grasp with which one embraces Christ that justifies and saves; but the fact that Christ is grasped, and that on Him we build and hope. The proper object being grasped, though that grasp be feeble, provided only there is sincere desire and determination to hold fast, there faith is genuine and saving, although the believer may not yet have reached the full assurance of faith. The drowning man, clinging to the rope cast to him, may not be sure it will bring him safely to shore; but if he holds on to it, even though with but one hand, that rope will bring him in nevertheless. The disciples believed and were accepted in their belief, even when they craved a greater degree of faith.

Thus much is necessary to be said and understood that timid and weak believers may not be thrown into despondency and despair. Doubting Castle is a sombre place for a believer to get into, and its walls, and gates, and bolts are very strong. And when souls are in danger of being locked in there every help and precaution must be used to keep them out. The devil has no better delight than when he can impose on believing souls the idea that their faith is worthless because so feeble, or that they are no Christians at all unless they can always be on the glorious mount of exultation

and assurance. If your faith is weak, pray that it may be strengthened, and use the means of becoming more clear and confident; but, above all, do not let go the rope nor give up in despair because you cannot feel certain and sure whether you will ever get safely to shore or not.

But still, if any one has doubts and misgivings in so great a matter, let him not rest satisfied with his estate, as if it would all come right of itself. God sometimes hides His face in this way, just to spur us on to deeper experiences and to a better enjoyment of Christ.

It is intended that we should have *assurance of faith*. Every provision for it exists. It is one of the offices of the Holy Spirit to impart it. And we should ever strive to become more and more assured by the bringing forth of the fruits of faith.

Two practical cautions, however, remain to be stated: One is, Don't expect too much at once. Faith is small at first. It has to learn to see, to walk, and to feed itself. Those people who seem to leap right out of sin into assurance of faith are apt to be very artificial believers, and are resting on what is likely to fail them after a while. Faith that comes into being at full stature is an abnormality,—a thing that has not come according to the ordinary laws of things. A child must learn its A, B, C's before it can read and enjoy Shakespeare. And, above all, do not think to have the assurance of faith in any outward signs, excitements, visions, ecstasies, or extraordinary

experiences. If you wait for that, you will never be sure; and you deceive yourself if you rest on any such thing.

Again, do not expect assurance and certainty of salvation while you do not attend to the duties and ordinances of religion. If you live on good terms with the world and your carnal self, neglect church, and prayer, and the communion, and excuse yourself here and there to indulge your own likes, indifference, and laziness, you ought to doubt of being a right Christian; for, if you *have* faith, you are doing the very thing to weaken, smother, and kill it. A faith that does not work practical obedience is dead. We are sinners all, and we must lament and confess it; but Christ has died for us, and procured full forgiveness to all that believe in Him. And if we believe in Him as our Saviour, we will also draw near in His ordinances with a true and honest heart, that we may be assured.

Faith grows and strengthens, like love, like hope, by converse and communion with that on which it feeds. Therefore there must be a diligent use of those things which have been mercifully given us as means of grace. A life of unwatchfulness, prayerlessness, or self-indulgence tends to the decay of faith, stands in the way of confident assurance, and, if persevered in, will extinguish saving faith altogether. The foundations stand ever sure, but they become so obscured to a vision dimmed by the love of sin and undutifulness that the soul cannot take to itself the

assurance which the Gospel promises are meant to give.

Having therefore, brethren, liberty to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having a great High Priest over the house of God; let us avail ourselves of our high privileges, establish ourselves in the faith that rests on Jesus, and draw near with a true heart, observing the Christian ordinances, and maintaining a conscience void of offence. In such case there is no ground for wavering in our hope, for He is faithful that hath promised.

Heavenly Guardianship.

Second Sunday after Easter.

The Lord is my Shepherd.—Ps. 23 : 1.



HIS little Psalm contains one of the fullest and tenderest utterances of assured faith to be found in any of the songs of Zion. It has perhaps made more precious melody in the hearts of God's children than any other composition ever given to the ancient Church. No tongue can tell the tears it has dried, the fears it has dispelled, the hopes it has begotten; the confidence it has inspired, and the peace it has breathed into timid and troubled souls, in its descent through these many ages. And it is so calm, beautiful, and overflowing with joyful faith, that we almost fear to touch it lest we should spoil it.

Thousands of years have passed since first it rose from the heart of the man who made it. For centuries it was sung by Hebrew tongues in old Judea; and weeping captives beside Babel's rivers comforted themselves with it in their sorrowful captivity. Dispensations have since been changed, and new revelations have found place in our world; but this inspired song still holds its place in the

affections of believers. It comes to us redolent with precious memories and with a clearer and sweeter light since Jesus was on earth. Wondrous has been its influence and its life, and eternity alone can reveal the comfort and blessing it has been to souls.

It is generally ascribed to David, to whom nature and life were parables of the sacred and divine. It seems to rise directly out of his own shepherd life. What he was to his flock imaged to him God's tender providence. His leading of his sheep into the watered pastures, where they could feed and rest in peace, pictured to him the goodness and grace of Jehovah. In his watchful guardianship to protect his flock against the wild beasts that prowled around, he read the unsleeping care of God to protect and defend His people. In conducting his charge through dark and threatening gorges, where he had to be near his timid sheep to encourage and direct them by his staff, and thus bring them out into new fields, he saw a life picture of Jehovah's nearness to His people amid earth's trying changes, and their passage through the valley and shadow of death. And that new land thus reached directed his thoughts to the better country beyond, and the gracious reception and entertainment of the worn and weary one in the blessed house of God. Beautiful and happy contemplations! How natural! How truthful! How full of comfort to the soul!

Jehovah exercises a rule and authority over all men and over all things; but there is a peculiar

and special office which He exercises over His chosen people, which is best illustrated by that of a shepherd over his flock. Accordingly we find this imagery constantly applied both in the Old and the New Testaments. Thus Asaph prayed, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock." So it was predicted of the coming Saviour, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs in His arms, and shall carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead them that are with young." So the Lord Jesus himself declares, "I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine; and I give unto them eternal life." Hence also the Apostles write of Him as "the great Shepherd of the sheep,"—"the Shepherd and Bishop of souls."

It is not easy in our modern times to realize what all is included in this designation. We know what a merchant is, a farmer, a legislator, a minister, an engineer, a soldier, a navigator, a mechanic, an author; but when we would have an idea of what is meant by a shepherd we have to go far back among phases of society so different from ours as to be totally foreign to what we now see and know.

Naturally, we might suppose a shepherd to be a very humble, servile personage; but in ancient times, when riches consisted chiefly of flocks and herds, a shepherd was one of the most distinguished of men. The office bordered on princely dignity. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and

David served as shepherds. And such an idyllic beauty and gracious authority connect with the office that the greatest and mightiest kings used it to denote their relations to their people. The shepherd was far above his flock in intelligence, strength, and ruling power. He was the king, lord, and absolute commander and guide of his sheep. They were his property, his possession. But for that very reason he was most concerned for their welfare. He was even joined to his flock, and never separated from it by day or by night. All his time, interest, and affection were given to the serving of it, guarding it from danger, leading it into good pastures, and exercising toward it all manner of tenderness and love. And in this we are to see and read the picture of our blessed Saviour's care of those whom He has bought with His blood. They are His possession—His peculiar treasure.

And with the great and glorious Jehovah filling such an office toward him, the Psalmist was full of joyful confidence.

Herein he found assurance of sufficiency for all his wants. No good shepherd will ever suffer his flock to starve. Times of scarcity may come, but he will see to it to find enough to serve them. Nor will our divine Shepherd do less for His people than the shepherd for his sheep. Wealth and abundance are not pledged; for wealth and abundance cannot feed the soul. Even leanness and famine may be the richer blessing. But with Jehovah as our Shepherd there can come no des-

titution that can destroy,—no real want that will not be amply met.

Herein also was plentiful enjoyment. As a flock in a valley of tender grass, where it could eat to fullness, drink of the purest waters, and lie down in quiet by the gentle streams; so blest did the Psalmist find himself as he believed and realized that Jehovah was his Shepherd.

In the midst of such lives as we are forced to live there is nothing that is more welcome to the soul than the idea of rest. But we seek it in vain in the pursuits and possessions of this world. None better know the utter hollowness of all that earth can give than those who have the most of it. The soul was made to rest in God, and can rest in nothing else. The truest enjoyment, and the only abiding peace, is in the living consciousness that Jehovah is our Shepherd.

Herein also all the trials, hardships, and sorrows of life are modified and transformed into a healthgiving discipline. "All we like sheep have gone astray," wide wandering from the paths of right. Hurts, bruises, and sorrows are the result. But the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. By His word and Spirit He comes to the faint and perishing, restoreth their lost strength, helps them back to their true place, and overrules their very afflictions to further them in righteousness. There is more joy in redemption than if there never had been need of it. Heaven is all the happier for the saints for the hurts of sin which they have felt.

Not indeed because there is merit and virtue in the miseries of transgression, but wholly and alone through the goodness and grace of an overruling God, and for His own Name's sake.

Herein also was comfort and fortification for the soul amid all the dark and threatening transitions that mark human existence. No earthly estate is secure and abiding. Those happy to-day may be in deepest sorrow to-morrow. Riches often make way for all the sorer poverty. He who is most honored one day may be execrated the next. And every one that lives must soon leave this world for quite another. All these transitions have chilling shades and disturbing elements from which nature shrinks. Whether it be from the adverse changes in this world, or the deeper shadows to be passed in leaving it, the soul is in great need of supports and assurances which only faith in God can give. But with the ever-living and allwise Jehovah for our Shepherd there is no occasion for alarm nor fear. Dark as things may seem, where He directs, and walks with us, and assures us by His presence and promises, the threatening gloom is lost in the light of His smiles, and His rod and His staff give ample comfort in the passage to the richer pastures in the beyond.

And as a princely host receives an honored guest, spreads before him a refreshing feast, anoints his head with fragrant oil, and fills his cup to overflowing; so the believer, who maintains his trust in God, comes out at last in abun-

dant triumph over all his foes. In the mansion of the Father's house He is favored with the welcome and joyous hospitality of God. When all foes have done their worst, and death is past, and the last in the train of the sad consequences of sin is gone, the shadows lift, a glorious morning breaks, and the soul stands washed and beautiful before the face of Him who has bought it by His blood.

And in all this is rooted and embodied the triumphant inference that goodness and mercy will surely attend us amid all the vicissitudes and changes of this life, and home with God be our eternal inheritance.

With the infinite and eternal One joined to us in all the intimacy, care, and abiding tenderness of the good and faithful shepherd, there can be no better security for our peace. Even the presence of an earthly friend is a wonderful comfort in pain and sorrow. The infant's fears subside in its mother's arms. The shrinking child gathers courage when its father is by its side. The flock feeds in contentment while it sees its shepherd near. And when the soul is assured of the loving presence of its almighty Guardian and Saviour, all cause for unmanly fear departs, and in its place there comes a peace and confidence that is proof against all the ills and adversities of time, and takes fast hold upon eternal blessedness.

Many good Christians are often full of disturbing doubts and fears. They believe, and yet they have serious misgivings. They are in trouble,

and cannot see how things are likely to eventuate, and so they fear the worst. They wonder how they will ever be able to get through. Will God interfere in their behalf? Is it wise to hold out in hopeful confidence when everything is so adverse and dark? How will they ever be able to meet death? Never mind, desponding soul. Learn to reason from this Psalm, and take courage from its writer's logic. Behold Jehovah's tenderness and love, and rise to the victorious blessedness of faith.


The one only great matter is to be able to say in truth, "The Lord is *my* Shepherd." It is not enough to believe that He was the Shepherd of the Psalmist, the Shepherd of the devout Jew; or that He is the Shepherd of other people, and of the Church in general. He must be to us personally and individually *our* Shepherd. He proposes indeed to be the Guardian and Saviour of every one willing to accept and come to Him. But this personal acceptance of Him, and obedient submission to His directions and commands, and surrender of heart and life to His care, trusting alone to His goodness, can by no means be dispensed with. And only as we thus give and submit ourselves to be led and saved as He wills, does He become our Shepherd.

O that we had more of the precious trust of this sweet singer! That we could without reserve repose in the saving guardianship of Jesus! How it would silence our murmurs, and hush our tumults, and swell our joys! God help us in our weakness! and may His banner over us be love!

Knowing the Lord.

Third Sunday after Easter.

And none of the disciples durst ask Him, Who art thou? Knowing that it was the Lord.—JNO. 21 : 12.

VERY careful reader of the Gospel must have noticed the mystery which hangs over the condition and movements of our blessed Saviour, during the forty days after his resurrection. Where He stayed, how His time was occupied, what sort of life He lived, are deeply hidden from human knowledge.

About twelve times He appeared to His disciples; but His interviews were short, and His manifestations were unsearchably mysterious. He entered the room where they were without the opening of the door; He forbade the familiarity which they had previously indulged; and He vanished from them in ways which no human intelligence could follow. Mary Magdalene recognized Him, when, with the old familiar voice, He called her by name; but when she thought to touch and embrace Him He withdrew himself and disappeared. He walked in close converse with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, entered their home, sat down with them to their meal,

and made himself known to them in the breaking and blessing of their bread; and then was gone. To the affrighted assembly of His followers He showed His scarred hands and pierced side, and invited them to handle Him and see that He was a real being, the same Jesus they had seen die; but by the manner of His coming and of His going, by the salutation He addressed to them, and by the endowment and commission which He gave them, He raised in their thoughts and feelings a sense of a divine presence and dignity. No proof of His humanity could be more conclusive than His proposal to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side;" but, at the same time, there went with it what evidenced the superhuman and divine, eliciting the response and confession: "*My Lord, and My God.*"

And so in the case before us. He stands on the shore as His disciples come in from the fishing. He says to them, "Children, have ye any meat?" And when they tell how unsuccessful their night's work had been, He bade them "Cast the net on the right side of the ship." They went as He directed, and while they let down the net He kindled a fire on the sand, prepared for them a morning meal, and bade them "Come and eat," when they returned. In all this He acted in the most human manner, so much so that they did not at first distinguish Him from ordinary frequenters of those shores. But with these simple

transactions, there was a demonstration of majesty which well nigh overwhelmed them. That cast of the net at His request flashed the conviction upon John: "*It is the Lord.*" And by the time they got to shore and partook of the meal He had prepared, "none of the disciples durst ask Him, Who art thou? *Knowing that it was the Lord.*"

The proper recognition of the Christ amid the duties of this present life is thus suggested for our consideration.

The Sea of Galilee presents a picture of our earthly life. It is not wide. It is bounded by narrow limits. It is islandless and without stopping-place from one shore to the other. It is very varied in condition. And it is beset with many dangers. Yet there is much good in it that may be fished up for our comfort and enrichment. And such is our life on earth.

It was around this sea that the particular interest of Christ clustered. His home was there. He walked on its waters, quelled its waves, and rebuked its storms. On its shores He dispossessed the demons; cast out evil spirits; fed the hungry; healed the suffering; uttered His richest parables; and spoke His loving beatitudes. About it He lingered, and showed himself, and called men to be His followers, and dealt out His mysterious bread and fishes, and gave commands concerning His sheep and lambs. And so He is occupied to direct and help us in this earthly life of trouble and need.

Nor can anything of abiding worth be made out of this sea of earthly life without Him. Men may embark upon it with all their wisdom, and toil with all their skill and power, and continue their endeavors till the morning breaks; but without Christ's word and help they will eventually come to shore with the sad confession that they have taken nothing. They may have good intentions, as these disciples had. Their aims may even be unselfish and beneficent. But if Jesus has not sent them, or their going is only according to their own devising, they will return with empty boats and wasted strength.

The world is full of such fruitless effort. People go where Christ has not sent them, or try to fish up good in ways in which Christ has not bid them, and they only toil in vain. They may constitute societies, institute moral reforms, bind themselves by solemn oaths to be faithful in moral deeds and devotion to one another; but if they cannot show a *Thus saith the Lord* for their proceedings, they will come back hungry and empty. Men may cast their nets without Jesus but then they will have to draw them without fishes, and find that they have toiled for naught.

We need to know that *there is a Christ*, who has bought us with His blood, and who lives, clothed with majesty, authority, and wisdom to direct and control our lives and energies. Without this truth living in our deepest convictions there can be no lasting good of life. We must believe that Jesus is; that He is the man who was

crucified; that He is risen from the dead; that all authority and power in heaven and on earth is His; and that it is His prerogative to prescribe and command what we shall do, and how employ ourselves. In other words, we must know that He is *the Lord*, and be so persuaded of it as to have no question on the subject. "The disciples durst not ask Him, Who art thou? *Knowing that it was the Lord.*"

Christ has really appeared upon these earthly shores,—appeared as a brother man,—although the incarnate Son of God. He has appeared also in resurrection power and glory, the mighty Victor over death and hell. His voice has sounded over these waters, and His word has come even into our ears. And He still presents himself to the view of our faith, as He presented himself to these disciples, and speaks to us the same directing words which He spoke to them. And what we need is to recognize Him as *our friend, our Lord, our God*, who, to all His human sympathy and kindly approaches, conjoins the majesty and authority of the Almighty. There is no lasting success without proper recognition of the Christ.

And knowing the Lord, we need to be obedient to His word. He has come to these shores to tell and show us where we "*shall find.*" He tells us where to let down the net. *Into the deep* we are to launch out;—into the deep of penitence for our sins, and humility for our unworthiness;—into the deep of self-denial and self-forgetfulness;—into the deep of pure and controlling reverence

and love for our Lord and Saviour;—into the deep of effort and self-sacrifice for Him.

“On the right side of the ship” we are to let down the net. The left side is the world’s proverbial symbol for wrong, emptiness, and loss. The left side is the side of the unsanctified and the unsaved. Therefore the word is, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.” However unpromising or difficult the way of righteousness and honest duty may seem, it is the only way of effectual success. If we are not willing to take the side of justice and right, we must consent to come empty to shore. In all the duties and endeavors of this world it behooves us to be sure of this that we cast the net “on the right side of the ship.”

There is also this encouraging fact that, while we are engaged doing the Master’s bidding on the sea, He is tenderly watching us from the shore. He has long since passed over to His glory. But while His disciples are yet on these waters He keeps himself near the margin and looks down upon them in their toil. His great heart goes out to them, and yearns to have them know and do the right, that they may have plenty. In all our disappointments, trials, difficulties, and disheartening endeavors Jesus is never far off. He walks the shore of every sea of trouble. And when we are ready to despair He meets us with His friendly words and fills our nets with ample compensation for all our obedient toils.

Jesus has indeed passed beyond the flood and

entered upon the glory which He had with the Father before the world was; but He has not forgotten us, and joins us in every moment of discouragement, and speaks to us as His children, and comforts us with His word and grace.

Blessed Jesus! Thy mercies are unsearchable, and Thy goodness is past finding out! Wonderful is Thy grace!

And then, when these disciples got to shore with their well-filled net, they made a still more cheering discovery. They were hungry, and cold, and exhausted with their night's toil; but "as soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." It was a grateful sight to men in their condition. Jesus had anticipated their wants; and while they were toiling on the waters He was making ready a warm and gracious meal for them on their landing.

These shores represent the world to which our blessed Lord has gone; and this incident explains what He is doing there. He is making ready a glorious repast for His wearied and toilworn disciples. And when once we reach those shores we will find there the fire of coals to warm us, and the blessed meal ready to satisfy us, and the glorified Saviour to deal out to us the viands and refreshment of the life eternal.

Oh, it was a happy morning for these disheartened men when they thus met their Master, and knew that it was the Lord! But it was only a dim foreshowing and feeble foretaste of the joy

of our final landing beyond these troubled waters, when the word of our Lord shall be: "Come and dine"—eat and be satisfied, drink, and never thirst again!

Behold, then, dear friends, the mercy and majesty—the condescension and glory—the sympathizing humanity and the commanding power and goodness of our Lord. Behold how He loves, and pities, and follows, and helps, and serves, at the same time that He directs and governs. Behold how heavenly almightiness comes to mingle in our earthly toils, to reward and bless our earnest labors, and to welcome us at last to the Christ-made repast preparing for us on yonder nearing shores. Behold, and let your fears and doubts and questionings be done away. Behold, and know, that it is the Lord, even *your* Lord and your *God*.

The Refreshing Word.

Fourth Sunday after Easter.

Hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.—DEUT. 32 : 1, 2,



WE see from this what great store God places upon His Word, and the ministration of it to the children of men. He likens its effect to that of the most precious things in nature. It is like the dropping rain to the parched earth;—like the distillation of the dews upon wilted plants;—like the showers upon the grass;—like the small rain upon the tender herb.

The natural man, spiritually considered, is like a plant without adequate moisture,—wilted, withered, parched, and perishing. There may be outward gayety and thrift, but inwardly all is dry and dying. The soul is in the condition of a plant that is yielding up its life for want of rain. And the word of God is that precious thing which alone can refresh and revive it.

We know what a sad thing a drought is. The ground becomes like rock; the streams forget to flow; the fountains fail; the verdure disappears

from the fields; the leaves shrink and shrivel; the flowers lose color and fragrance; the flocks are in distress of hunger and thirst; the birds hide away and refuse to sing; nature becomes pulseless; and all things are ready to perish. But when God sends His clouds over the land, and pours out rains from heaven, and sends His dews and showers, how glad and marvellous is the change!

And so it is where God's word comes into the soul with its life-giving freight. Where its blessed tidings are received, sinking strength recovers, and dying hopes rekindle, and perishing souls revive, and refreshing from the Lord sets a thousand springs a flowing, and the Spirit of the Almighty awakens long-suspended pulsations, and everything sings and rejoices with a new-begotten animation.

Gently also are all these great things wrought. There is no bluster nor tempest. When the winds are high there is no dew. It cometh not with observation. It forms under the wing of silence and quietude. The quickest ear cannot hear its motions; the clearest eye cannot detect the delicate process of its formation. No man can trace its beginning, and no commotion or violence ever betrays its presence. Yet it comes to every leaf, touches every blade of grass, bathes every growing thing; and when the day dawns the whole landscape is arrayed in its glittering wealth.

And so it is with the divine word. God sometimes speaks in the thunder and the tempest; but that is in wrath and judgment. The Gospel is

gentle and quiet. Storms can break ships in pieces, unroof palaces, overthrow forests and towers, and fill a continent with terror; but they are not the symbol of God's saving word. The earthquake can convulse the seas, engulf cities, shake the mountains; but it is not the symbol of God's saving word. Fire can lay habitations in ashes, and sweep with a power which no resistance can overcome; but from all such terrific agents we are conducted to the still, small voice, the gentle rain, the genial showers, the quiet dew, as the images of God's working upon the soul. Not amid excitements and boisterous agitations, but in thoughtfulness and silence,—not in uproar and wild confusion, but in solemn meditation and the hidden places of prayer and calm soul-searching,—does the life-giving power of God impart itself to willing hearts.

The still hours are the hours of the dew; and they are in like manner the hours for God's word to do its holy offices. The command is: "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." When we withdraw ourselves from the noise and bustle of the world;—when we calm our minds in solitude;—when we quietly muse upon the great themes of what and where we are, whither we are going, and what is to become of us;—when we softly lift our thoughts to God and heaven;—these are the moments and attitudes in which the Spirit speaks most effectively, and the sacred messages of heaven gather and flow in upon our souls to quicken us unto salvation.

The same figures tell us of plentiful variety. Rain, and dew, and small rain, and showers fill out a catalogue of copious abundance, suited to every necessity and reaching every need. In the common course of things rains and dews cover whole countries at once, and touch every growing thing, and supply all alike. And so God's refreshing word is a common blessing, which comes to each, and offers its reviving power alike to every one. If any are not saved, it is not because God has not sent out his word to them, nor because that word is in any manner inadequate. If the dropping of the rain fails, there is the dew and the small rain; and if these fail, there are the showers. There is no deficiency in form or plentifulness. Abundant prosperity is thus assured to the receptive and obedient.

Very near to us also are these blessed agencies. The rain does not come from the stars. The showers do not spring from other worlds. The dews are not imported from the distant heavens. All these blessed things reside in our atmosphere, and have their source in what God has ordained for our world. A little change in the temperature makes them ours. They are in continual readiness to drop in blessing upon the earth. Fit symbol this of the precious word and grace of God! It is everywhere and always about us, and in us, and ready to do all its offices of good upon us. "*The word is nigh thee*, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach." It is in the very air we breathe. It

surrounds us wherever we go. It needs only the right conditions in us to discharge its treasures into our bosoms. We have only to believe,—to assure ourselves of it,—to receive it,—and it is ours. If only the heart of unbelief be put away, and the flare of this world and its noisy doings be shut out from the soul, and the calm glories of heaven allowed to spread open their wonders to our contemplation, no matter where or when, there the dews of eternal life distil in all their reviving freshness, and there the powers of God's salvation are. The odors of the divine presence are there, and all the reviving touches of immortality. Unspeakable treasures are at hand for hearts open to receive them.

Good prospects are also symbolized by these figures. The rain, the dew, the showers, in their season, prophesy of plentiful harvests. When God promised to be as the dew unto Israel it meant growth and fruitfulness. It pledged that Israel should bloom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon, and spread out in beauty as the olive tree, and fill the earth with fragrance. And so the Lord hath declared: "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; *so shall my word be*, that goeth forth out of my mouth."

Whether we be lilies or olive-plants, vines or cedars, grain or grass, God's word is meant to nurture us, to make us grow, and strengthen, and

bring forth fruit to His praise. To this end it is adapted, as the rain and the dew. By it we may nourish ourselves into the lily's loveliness, the olive's beauty, the cedar's excellence, the vine's glad fruitfulness, and the worth of the harvest's golden sheaves.

God also expects this of us. For this He hath given His word. It has no other end than that we should hear it, receive it, and walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, being fruitful in every good work.

There is, however, still another thought in this imagery. Rain is not comfortable while it is falling. It is only when it has fallen, and the clouds clear away from the sky, and the sun comes forth in its beauty, that the good is realized. Then it is that the joy comes. Then the brooks and the birds sing; the fields are alive with gladness; the leaves glisten with joy; the clouds on the horizon take on tints of molten gold; the rainbow arches in majesty over the green hills; glory is on all the face of nature; and a voice from heaven calls: "Rise up, my fair one, and come away; for the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time for the singing of birds is come, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell."

The dew comes with night and darkness. It is only chilling till the morning breaks. But as soon as the day opens the loveliness appears. Then it seems as if an angel had oversown the fields with diamonds and hung a brilliant on

every blade and leaf. The very air is redolent of heavenly fragrance. And the whole earth is breathless in the glories of a celestial baptism!

And so it is with the precious work of grace upon the soul. It has its discomforts. Its benefits cannot be without sacrifices. The word calls for repentance; and repentance is never pleasant. Clouds often come, and afflictive experiences. But they are for good, and soon clear away. The night does not last. And when the sunlight comes, and day renews itself, then shall magnificence greet the vision beyond all that we have ever dreamed. Then first shall be disclosed the glorious fruits and living splendors wrought in this time of our sufferings, toils, crosses, and penitential prayers. Then, what was filthy shall be clean; and what was dead shall glow with life; and what was dark shall glitter with resplendent light. Then shall break forth the long-silent songs. Then shall flow and swell the blessed river. Then shall vanish the curtains that conceal heaven's gates of gold and pearl. And over all the hills and plains shall stand up a myriad congregation of living jewels, flashing with the glory of the dew of righteousness.

The great matter is, for us to hear the word. This is God's call to all the earth. And it is a gracious call, which it is our highest interest and our highest duty to obey. The direction is: "Receive with meekness the engrafted Word." Our ears must be open to the truth; our hearts

must receive it; our minds must be made up to obey it. This is the demand.

Not all hearing of the word is blessed. There is a hearing so lacking in appreciation, so indifferent in its attention, that all good of it is soon lost. There is a hearing which for the time entertains and believes; but it is so superficial in its regard, so shallow in depth of interest, and so feeble in persistence, that all good of it soon wilts and disappears. There is a hearing with every element and promise of thrifty results and a blessed harvest; but which soon becomes so encumbered "with cares, riches, and pleasures of this life," that ultimate fruitfulness is hindered and choked. There are rocks on which dews and rains have no effect to cure their sterility. There are sands and deserts through which the rainfalls sink away and no fruitfulness ever comes. And there are swamps and wilds where everything grows with luxuriance, but where the weeds and briars are left to take the lead, and no good ever comes of the rich and well-moistened soil. And so it is with the hearing of the word. It depends upon our temper and spirit whether the true blessedness of these heavenly dews and rains is to result. In themselves they are freighted with unspeakable benediction; but devout attention and earnest dutifulness on our part are needed to get the benefit. Some hear much and learn but little; while others hear but little and profit much; and the whole difference lies in the honest endeavor to be "not a forgetful hearer, but a doer

of the work." And when God says, "Hear, O earth, the words of my mouth," the meaning is that the whole benefit of His mercies toward us now depends largely upon ourselves; and that only those who have a hearing ear, an understanding heart, and a willingness to believe and obey, can share the rejuvenating power and grace which the word of God is meant to impart. Therefore the Saviour's admonition is, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Thy Word, O Lord, like gentle dews,
Falls soft on hearts that pine;
Lord, to Thy garden ne'er refuse
This heavenly balm divine.
Watered by Thee, let every tree
Forth blossom to Thy praise,
By grace of Thine bear fruit divine,
Through all the coming days.

Divine Jewels.

Fifth Sunday after Easter.

And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.—MAL. 3 : 17.



OD has His jewels. And when we consider the immensity of His possessions we wonder that these jewels should be dwellers in this world, even children of men, like ourselves. But, as far as we know, God has centred more interest, affection, and expenditure upon our race than upon any other portion of His universe. Even now He is carrying on here a system of gracious operations for the gathering of jewels for the adornment of His everlasting throne.

Who, then, are these spiritual gems and treasures? and how are they distinguished? The answer is in the context.

Malachi wrote in very evil times. Great corruptions of faith and life had seized upon the Jewish people. Even many of the priests were infidels, and the mass of the people were correspondingly irreverent. But the apostacy was not total. God never leaves himself altogether without witnesses. In the darkest hours of the Church's his-

tory there were always some few lights left. And so it was in the days of Malachi.

The first mark noted of these better people is that *they did not drift with the corrupt current*,—they did not follow the multitude. If people would serve God, they dare not be conformed to this world. If Enoch, Methuselah, and Noah had gone with the ordinary course of feeling and sentiment in their day, their names would not be on the roll of saints. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had to separate themselves from the common herd of men and to live as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Moses had to alienate himself from Egypt, and Daniel to take firm stand against the heathenisms of Babylon. Christ took issue with the ruling tone of His day, and chose His disciples *out* of the world, so that while in it they were no longer of it. And so the Lord's people are ever a peculiar people, having renounced the vanities of the world and set themselves to seek a city yet to come.

A second mark of these people was *the principle on which they acted*. The record says "*they feared the Lord.*" Jehovah was an immense reality to their souls. It was not that they were alarmed and terrified at thought of His presence, and crouched like slaves before the majesty of His power. It was not that they lived in unmanly dread of His anger, lest He should blast them with His judgments. But they saw and recognized in Him the ideal of all perfection, whom it was their sublimest happiness to know, honor,

and obey. They saw and recognized in Him the worthiest object of human thought, and a mingling of greatness so exalted with goodness so unsearchable as to command their profoundest awe and their supremest reverence and affection. They saw and recognized in His service the highest good of man, and that to which every one is bound by the most sacred of obligations. All this was so planted, rooted, and living in their souls that they made it their superlative aim to direct all their ways and doings with reference to Him, ready to spend and be spent as His dutiful and loving children. One thought absorbed and controlled them, and that was, to be on terms with so worthy a Being, so great a King, and so tender a Father. This was the principle from which sprang the difference between them and the perverted multitudes. The Scriptures call it "*the fear of the Lord*," which is "the beginning of wisdom," and which is also the middle and end of all sanctity.

They were also further marked by *the way they nurtured and kept alive this principle*. Realizing the existence and majesty of God, it is said of them that they "*thought upon His Name*."

Everything depends on our thinking. Words are only the wings of thought. Actions are only incarnated thinking. As the thinking is, so is the man. Our whole visible life is simply the blossom and fruit of invisible thought. As the hidden machinery of the clock moves the hands to tell the hour; so the mental operation of what

lies behind all human words and actions determines the manifestations of the life. And thinking on God's Name, which signifies Himself, is one of the vital things in true religion. God's Name is nothing to us if we do not think upon it, do not mentally apprehend it, do not spiritually take in its significance. The reason why people get so far away from Him is, that they do not have Him in their thoughts. But these people thought upon God's Name. They kept before them what God is, and so learned to love, honor, and trust in Him, as their supreme good.

And yet another mark of these people was, *they took pleasure in communicating with each other* on the great subject. "They spake often one to another."

When something commanding possesses the soul, it is always a delight to find others of like mind with ourselves. Full kindred hearts overflow into each other, and the confiding intercourse multiplies the pleasure. The human soul loves sympathy, and is greatly built up, warmed, and established by companionship in common feelings, aims, and ideas. "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

There was a time in Israel when the people "took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company," and their pious conversations made even the valley of Baca a pleasure. But it was not so in Malachi's time. Then the ways of Zion mourned. The faithful were few, and everything around them was a grief

and sorrow to their pious souls. They could only sigh and cry over the abominations that were done. And we can well understand how precious it was to them to find one and another here and there with whom they could commune touching what so engaged their hearts and prayers.

We know how it was with the sorrowing disciples on their way to Emmaus as they conversed of their common grief, and what a blessed satisfaction it was to them that a stranger who fell in with them took such an interest in their conversation. We know with what fervid emotion they afterward referred to that experience, remarking how their hearts burned within them while He talked with them by the way. And such blessed seasons did these saints of the text have as they came together in little companies to speak about their common griefs, faith, hopes, and interest in the Name and promises of God.

It is hardly in human power for a man to be a saint for himself alone. Religion is personal, but it is also social. We are particularly exhorted not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but to exhort one another daily. We are to teach and admonish one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. All this we profess to do in our meetings for holy worship, where the Word is handled, instruction given, prayer, confession, and exhortation made, and the Name of the Lord praised and exalted. Such sacred converse helps to keep true religion alive. The ut-

terances of one heart awaken feelings in other hearts, and the interaction begets a swelling train of influences, the power of which is very great and salutary.

Hence we find it one of the marks of the saintship of these people that "they spake often one to another." They had not the opportunities for it that we have, but they *made* opportunities, and they improved them. And so it must be with us, if we would be favorably recorded in the book of God. Society in religion is to be cultivated.

These, and such like people, God calls "*jewels*" — *His jewels*. It is a precious and significant figure. A jewel in its native state is but a stone, lying in darkness, covered with clay, clogged up in its matrix. It must be brought out of its coarse envelope, cut, ground, polished, and set, in order to come to its place of distinction and honor. And thus it is with these jewels of God. In their native condition they are part of the common conglomerate of earth. They are capable of being fashioned into gems of beauty and value; but all passes for nothing until some intelligent power from without is brought to bear upon them.

Much cleansing, testing, and grinding is necessary to develop their proper worth and beauty. Hence many of the severities and hardships experienced in this world. God handles, and rubs, and tries, and grinds His jewels to bring out their qualities. The process is not quickly over. One washing, or severe application, is not enough.

No one becomes a saint in a day, or by mere transfer from the quarry to the workshop. Many a sharp tool and severe friction has to be employed. Cut after cut is inflicted to bring the rough gem into shape, rid it of its flaws, and adjust its surfaces. First one side and then another is pressed to some gritting and tearing substance until it would seem as if the intention were to destroy it. But so God's jewels are dressed and fashioned. Archbishop Leighton used to say, "Those that God has selected for His cabinet He polishes most, and has His tools oftenest upon." If we were mere clay or common rock, He would not deal with us in ways so trying. He takes us for jewels; He knows what we are capable of becoming; therefore, to bring out our qualities, He takes us through oft painful experiences. He does not mean harm to us by what He makes us endure, but chastens us because we are sons, and is at work to trim, and shape, and polish us for the greater glory and the higher place. Patient submission and humble trust are meanwhile our duty.

Jewels are a peculiar treasure. Great fortunes are stored in them. They are held as a special joy, and prized with greatest fondness by their owners. And thus precious to God are His people. They are His *jewels*. He guards and treasures them. All things are conditioned and ordered with reference to their good and honor. Here these jewels of God are in the shop of the lapidary. They are not yet set, or "made up." They are not yet in place as the displayed orna-

ments of the King. But God hath appointed a "day when He will make up His jewels."

We know about that day. The Scriptures are everywhere full of it, and of what is then to happen. It is the day for which all other days were made,—the day when the whole mystery of providence and grace shall come to final consummation. The Lord is yet to come forth out of His royal chambers, put His jewels on, and array Himself in the glories He has all this while been accumulating and fashioning. Then He will "*make up His jewels*," join them to Himself in all the triumphant blessedness of His Kingdom. And in that day His people shall be *His*, and appear with Him in their final settings. Then they shall glow and shine as the rings of His fingers, the bracelets of His arms, the clasps upon His garments, the girdle around His breast, the necklace on His shoulders, the crowns on His head, the sceptre in His hand, and the sapphire throne on which He sits; while the canopy that spans over Him, and the very streets, and gates, and even foundations of the city in which He dwells shall flash and blaze with these immortal brilliants, kindled into living beauty by the light of His own ineffable Self.

Jewels are precious even before they are made up. Great sums are paid for them. Immense store is set upon them. But the common world knows little or nothing of them. It is only when they are "*made up*," put in place, and appear upon their owners on occasion of their use that

their excellences are manifest and their full glory shown. So God's people are dear and precious to Him now. Christ hath purchased them at a great price, not of silver and gold, but of His own precious blood. He knows where they are. They are never out of His mind or special care. The world does not know them, but God knows them, and looks after them, and holds them in His regard as His treasures. But only in the day when He shall *make up His jewels*, and the sunlight of eternity is lifted upon them will their worth and glory appear.

And a blessed day to God's people that will be. The very graves shall open and all the long-forgotten dead shall live again. A new and brighter Sun shall rise, never more to set. The everlasting day shall then have dawned. Heaven and earth shall have come to a new Genesis.

Dear friends, to this honor and this destiny are we poor sinful mortals called. To turn our backs upon the emptiness and follies of this perishing world, to shape our lives by the principle of Godly fear, to think upon Jehovah's Name, to speak often one to another in meek confession and faithful converse, and to plant ourselves upon His blessed promises in full confidence and hope in His mercy; this is what He asks of us, that we may be His in the day when He shall make up His jewels. His Name be praised for such unspeakable favors! And His grace be with every one willing for dedication to such a fortune!

The Sublime Departure.

Ascension Day.

And a cloud received Him out of their sight.—ACTS 1: 9.



OUR Saviour's earthly life had now reached its end. The forty days of His stay after His resurrection were accomplished. The time had come for Him to resume the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. He had held His last interview with His disciples. And now, having led them out as far as Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. "And a cloud received Him out of their sight."

There is something very sad in a final separation from a good friend. We know how the Elders at Miletus were affected when parting from St. Paul, who had done so much for them, "sorrowing most of all that they should see his face no more." How must it then have touched the hearts of these disciples to see their blessed Lord withdraw from them His earthly presence for ever! But His departure was so beautiful, so assuring, and so full of blessed promise, that

“they returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God,”—not for their bereavement, but for the glad significance embodied in that sublime ascension.

Not without good reason, the Christian Church from the beginning has made the Ascension of our Lord the subject of a special annual Festival. The fact is that the Ascension of Christ ranks in importance with His birth, death, and resurrection; but, strange to say, much less attention is given to it. Many are prompt and devout in noting and observing Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter; but when it comes to the grand ascension and heavenly enthronement of our blessed Lord, though furnishing equal cause for our gratitude and rejoicing, few seem so to regard it, and few concern themselves about its celebration. This ought not so to be.

Viewed at its lowest, the Ascension of Christ was the crowning of a life of condescension, self-denial, and sacrifice for the welfare of perishing mankind, which deserves to be held in ever grateful remembrance. It was abundantly merited by such a life; and it shows what those may expect who copy Christ's example and devoutly follow His steps. It should therefore fill us with joyous confidence in the righteous goodness of the heavenly Father, as it assures us that He will not forget any work or labor of love we may show toward His Name, or in ministering to the welfare of His Church and people.

But the Ascension of Christ was necessary to the completeness of His mediatorial work. The great atonement for the congregation of Israel demanded more than the slaying of the victim and the gathering up of its blood. The High Priest had to take that blood up into the Holy of holies and present it before the divine Presence ere the great absolving benediction could go forth. And so Christ, our Great High Priest, had to pass into the heavens, into the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, into the Holiest of holies, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood, in order to obtain redemption for us. Having given His life a sacrifice for our sins, it yet remained for Him to have it accepted in heaven, in order that repentance and remission of sins might be preached in His Name. Neither His being delivered for our offences nor His rising again for our justification could effectually avail without His Ascension to the Father, there to present His meritorious sacrifice for us. With all the transcendent virtue of His death and resurrection, "so long as He remained on earth, there was no evidence that He had won for our nature readmission into Paradise. While He hung upon the cross the curse was being exhausted; and when He came forth from the tomb it was pronounced to be wholly removed; but the taking away of the curse was not necessarily the restoring of the nature to all its forfeited privileges and blessings. If we stop at the resurrection, we do not reach all our lost honors. Christ

raised from the dead can only assure of deliverance from the grave ; we must have Christ raised from the dead and *received up into glory* for assurance that, springing from the dust, we are to soar into God's presence." Our hope must anchor within the veil, or it is not of a sort to satisfy ; but that can only be by the entrance there of our Representative and Forerunner, even Jesus, our great High Priest. Yes, as Christ had to die to atone for our sins, and rise again in proof of the sufficiency of His sacrifice, so He had to go to secure recognition of it in heaven, and to prepare a place for us among the many mansions of the Father's house.

But the Ascension of Christ was necessary in still another important respect. Our condition in this world, and our preparation for the next, require the dispensation of the Spirit to apply the truth, and to enlighten, guide, comfort, and sanctify. Without this "power from on high,"—this ministration of the Holy Ghost,—there could be no effectual salvation for any of us. And that this Helper and Advocate might come, Christ had to go away, and thus put himself in position to send the Comforter. Without the presence and influences of the Holy Ghost, the Apostles would have been helpless, and the Church never could have been securely planted. Indeed, the whole success of Christianity in the hearts and lives of men depends upon the presence, aid, and sanctifying power of the Spirit. A blessed thing for man it therefore was that Christ ascended to the Father

to send us the help and comfort of the Holy Ghost. He had to be thus glorified before the Spirit could come in His fullness.

And a still further reason for being joyfully thankful for our Saviour's Ascension is that it gave earnest and pledge of our own. He is the Head which the members must needs follow. He ascended as our Forerunner, and a Forerunner means that others are on the same way to the same place. His entering *for us* implies our entrance also. His Ascension took our nature into heaven, and as we are branches of that same vine, and joined to Him in the same organism, His Ascension is virtually our ascension, the first fruits of a like harvest to follow. Taking our stand on Olivet, and gazing on the blessed Saviour as He mysteriously mounts up into the high heavens, we behold our Lord cleaving a way for us into that upper world, and giving us example of how all believers are to ascend in due time to the same heavenly realms. Yes,

In our blessed Lord's Ascension
We by faith behold our own.

Who, then, can question or deny that there is as much to enlist our interest and awaken our grateful joy in our Saviour's Ascension, as in any other event of His marvellous history? Mark this, dear friends, and remember it, that you may give due honor to an event so blessed and on which so much depended. Christmas joy is right; and Easter joy is right; but there is no less reason

for joy in the Ascension of our Lord than in His birth or His resurrection.

And if, indeed, we be risen with Christ, and have duly entered into the joyous truths of our faith, the practical effect is plain. We cannot follow the history to its consummation in heaven with true appreciation of the facts, without being moved to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." Following Him in His Ascension, with true faith in its reality, and its great worth to us, there will needs go with it a corresponding uplifting of our affections to that home of blessedness whither He has gone, and which He is making ready for all His believing people. Our treasure being in heaven, our hearts will also ascend thither. Quickened together with Him, it is also our high privilege, by the same faith, to sit together with Him in heavenly places, and to enjoy through hope something of the heavenly life even while strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Let us, then, as citizens of a celestial commonwealth, seek to demean ourselves accordingly, ever grow in zeal for that heavenly country, and eagerly look for the coming again of our glorified Lord to change our vile body into likeness with His own, and to receive us unto himself; that, where He is, we may be also.

Heavenly Enthronement.

Sunday after Ascension.

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.—Ps. 110 : 1.



THESE words tell of the majesty and glory of Jesus, our Saviour.

They ascribe to Him *great personal dignity*. Our hopes do not rest on an arm of mere flesh, but on one who is here called David's *Lord* as well as David's Son. David, by inspiration, here calls Him *Jehovah*—a name never given to a created being, and he elsewhere represents the eternal Father as calling Him *God*; for though He was a true *Man*, He is at the same time true *God*,—of one substance with the Father, “God, over all blessed for ever.”

And along with this personal dignity is *very sublime exaltation*. The eternal Father saith to Him, “Sit Thou at My right Hand.”

Our Saviour's life on earth was very lowly and humiliated; but, having suffered, being despised and rejected by men, persecuted, crucified, and slain, God hath highly exalted Him. The right hand is always the place of highest honor, and thither has Jesus gone. Moreover, He is *seated*

there; not made to stand as a servant, but to *sit* as an equal,—to share the place and throne of God. When the Word came from eternal Majesty: “Sit Thou at My right hand,” there was investment with participation in the government and dominion. So Jesus himself declared to the Church of the Laodiceans, that He is “Set down with His Father in His throne.” According to St. Paul, “God hath given Him a Name which is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.” And His Ascension from Mt. Olivet was not only a removal from visible connection with the present world, but a glorious investiture in heaven. It was His exaltation as a Prince and Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins to as many as will accept Him as their Lord. Yes, it is one of the great and glorious truths of our holy Christianity that He who was born at Bethlehem, crucified on Calvary, and buried in Joseph’s tomb, is now enthroned as the Lord of angels, the Prince of life, the Head over all things.

But with all, *Jesus has enemies in this world.* We would hardly suppose this. The conclusion would rather be that all rational beings would “kiss the Son” and haste to be on terms with a potentate so great and mighty, while He waits to be gracious, lest they should be driven from His presence and perish forever. We would think that such unexampled love and goodness promoted to the throne would command all hearts

and set all the children of men singing Halleluia. But it is not so. Although enthroned over all and blessed for ever, His reign is not yet enforced upon all. There be countless multitudes in the enjoyment of His bounties who refuse to have Him rule over them. Men hated Him while He lived on earth, and the masses of men hate Him still, and refuse to accept and serve Him as their Lord and Salvation. The story of the cross has not melted them, and the glory of His Majesty has not awed them into submission. Their hearts, their lives, their philosophies, and all their temper and thinking, are against His rights, teachings, and merciful overtures. Whatever they may have to say by way of excuse or apology for it they must be rated as His enemies. They are under the power of the carnal mind, which is not only inimical toward God, but "enmity" itself; and whatever fair or plausible name they may assume, they are the seed of the devil, —the enemies of the mediatorial King in whom our salvation stands. It is a sad record, but it is true.

These "enemies" of the Christ are not to remain for ever. They are bound to be subjugated or destroyed. The eternal Father hath decreed to put them under the feet of His Anointed,—to make them his "footstool." They *must* be brought under, or the Kingship of Jesus must remain limited and imperfect. His very investment at the right hand of eternal Majesty is forepledge and guarantee that His rule must go into

universal effect and absolute enforcement. There is nothing in existence that can withstand it; and as Christ is Lord, all antagonism to Him must needs be subdued and put down.

There are different ways of destroying enemies.

There was once a king who came to his throne against very malignant opposition. He was afterward reproached for being so kind and gracious to those who had shown such bitter enmity. His answer was: "Don't I destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" And this is the way in which Jesus subjugates and destroys many of His enemies. It is now the thing to which His chief attention is given. These are the days of His patience and long suffering, in which He is engaged by His ministers, Spirit, and Providence to win His enemies into submission, reconciliation, and love. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Hence He continues to bear with them, to show them every kindness, to ply them with merciful overtures and gentle pleadings, that He may bring them to a better mind. And by these means myriads on myriads of those who were among His bitter foes have been persuaded, melted into willing submission, and made His devoted friends and champions, who counted it an honor to suffer or even die for Him. In all the ages since Jesus ascended up into glory people have thus been won from their old satanic master, fallen out of the ranks of the enemy, and accepted place under the banner of Christ and salvation. We can to-

day count millions on millions who have been persuaded to drop their unreasonable enmity and hatred and to accept fellowship with God's saints.

And this is altogether the most desirable way Christ has chosen for destroying His enemies. It is one of those blessed results of the heavenly enthronement of our Saviour, in which we may well rejoice and be glad. But for this, our own case would be hopeless, and no happy eternity would there be for any of us. It is because Jesus now fills the throne that the Holy Ghost is sent, that the gifts of mercy are so amply bestowed, that a way has been opened for us into the holiest of all, and that we are now privileged to anticipate a blessed home with Him in glory everlasting.

But there be masses of Christ's enemies who are not melted nor changed by all these gracious ministrations to win and save them. His cross and tender compassion do not impress them. His goodness does not avail to bring them to repentance. They are so enamored with their own selfish likes, so wedded to their carnal ways, so satisfied to risk it without troubling to please their rightful King and Benefactor, that their place is with His enemies, for their hearts are not with Him. What, then, is to be done with such? Surely they cannot go on forever in the enjoyment of God's merciful goodness, while trampling thus upon all His royal rights and making light of all His costly arrangements for their salvation. An absolute dominion cannot always permit and tolerate incorrigible rebellion. And when all gra-

cious means have failed, what else remains in such cases but to bring armed force to bear for their suppression? Interposing only persistent hardihood against all the instrumentalities and efforts of patient love, what is left to them but to be crushed by that invincible Power which they have so unfeelingly defied? There is no other remedy. Loath and slow as the King may be to resort to it, He cannot be King and not do it. The word and provisions of mercy spurned, must bring the sword of judgment at the end.

Jehovah is in a manner silent during these years of grace. Sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily. It is not that He is indifferent as to how His word and mercies are treated. It is not that He is slack concerning His promises, as men count slackness. It is wholly from His long suffering to usward, that He may not ruin those whom peradventure would yet be brought to terms with His gracious Majesty. But, in the very nature of things, there must come a time when His forbearance can go no further,—when patience is exhausted,—when mercy itself must take the form of wrath,—when those who will not bend must break. Otherwise the devil will prove mightier than God, and human hardihood stronger than inflexible justice.

This then is the fixed and unalterable law: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be condemned—condemned with an everlasting condemnation. Even the worst and most careless can be saved,

if they will; and those most steeped in rebellion against God and righteousness may have free forgiveness and eternal life, if they will but throw down their arms and submit to the merciful Saviour as their King. But, if the people will persist in neglecting and rejecting the costly overtures of divine grace and goodness, there remains to them nothing but the blackness of darkness for ever. It is useless for any to demur, for it cannot be otherwise.

This, then, is the showing of our text. Our Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father, and made co-partner of enthroned Godhead. He is there as Head over all things for His Church,—there to give gifts unto men,—there to minister eternal salvation to all who believe on Him. He is there in glorified humanity, as well as in the glory of Deity, and so with a brother's heart wields an almighty arm. In the place and power of an invincible King, He has experimental knowledge of human weaknesses, wants, and sorrows, and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Exalted far above all principalities and powers, He still cherishes a tender good will to us, and would fain bring us all to His heavenly glory.

But the showing also is, that it will not do to neglect or despise His word. With Jesus on the Throne, it will never do to take sides against Him, or to be found among His enemies. Failing to be on terms with Him, we must needs be friendless in the last extremity. And therefore

our supremest duty, as our highest privilege, is,
to seek His favor, accept His offers, and serve
Him all our days.

Princes to His imperial Name
Bend their bright sceptres down ;
Dominions, thrones, and powers rejoice,
To see Him wear the crown.

Archangels sound His lofty praise
Through every heavenly street ;
And lay their highest honors down,
Submissive at His feet.

Those soft, those blessed feet of His.
That once rude irons tore,—
High on a throne of light they stand,
And all the saints adore.

This is the Man, th' exalted Man,
Whom we, unseen, adore ;
But when our eyes behold His face
Our hearts shall love Him more.

Strength and Comfort.

Whit Sunday.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.—ISA. 40 : 31.



EVERY Christian has a race to run, heights to ascend, burdens to bear, and victories to achieve. And for this every Christian needs strength and a large degree of spiritual power. In an unsympathizing and hostile world, such as we have to deal with, religion cannot be made a mere by-play or recreation. Humanity is so weak; there is in it so much indisposition to spiritual activity; carnal preferences are so strong; and we are so prone to be turned aside by temptations and discouragements, that a good store of active energy is required to bring us through in safety.

Spiritual power is the great want of the Church. It was so in the ill days in which Isaiah lived, and it is the same to-day with many professed Christians. Some have never half entered into their profession. Some who were once among the brightest and most devoted, have become weary and slack in their Christian life. Some have fallen victims to temptation, and never re-

turned to duty. And so the Church, which was meant to be Christ's spotless Bride, presents the aspect of a hospital, full of impotent people, weak, ailing, prostrate, and scarcely alive in spiritual things.

And a blessed thing it is for us that help is within our reach. Apostatizing Israel was not so far gone that they might not have their strength renewed and their alienations cured. There was still a balm in Gilead and a competent Physician there. And the same is even more blessedly true in our case. The means of improvement are at hand. It is not by might or power of an earthly sort, but by that Holy Spirit, given of God to help our infirmities.

When Christ ascended to the Father He sent forth the Holy Ghost, as this day commemorates, whose presence abides with His Church from age to age, and whom the Father is ever willing and ready to bestow upon them that ask Him. There is indeed abundance of quickening and renewing power for those who seek it.

We know what the Holy Ghost did for the first disciples; and what blessed transformations He wrought in them. New graces and powers came, lifting them high above all that they were before. Presently they showed themselves knowing, confident, joyous, and efficient to a degree which astonished the world. They had been weak, timid, forgetful. They had forsaken their Lord in the hour of trial. But by the Baptism of Pentecost they were confirmed, established, and made strong

in all spiritual qualities. All fear of man, all doubting, and all dread of death were effectually cast out. He who denied his Lord when confronted by a maid was now emboldened openly to accuse Sanhedrim and people with the murder of the Christ, and to preach with such heavenly unction that thousands were convicted, turned from their enmity, and at once enrolled under the banner of the crucified One. O for such another Baptism for the Church! What new life it would bring!

And why should we not have it? There are indeed degrees in the manifestations of the Spirit's power. The Holy Ghost does not work in all to the same extent, because all are not called to the same specific service or sphere of action. The first disciples needed more than is needed now, and they got it; but the same Spirit still lives and abides with the Church. The promises concerning Him hold now that held then. Like provision for like necessities still exists, and should be more earnestly sought. God's hand is not shortened that He cannot save, nor His ear heavy that He cannot hear. Responsibility for our deficiencies and defects cannot be charged on Him, nor on any changes or weakening in the economy of His grace. If Christians now are invalid and infirm, it is not because God has withdrawn His gifts and promises. Many only half believe; or compromise with the world; or enslave themselves to their selfish greed and ambition; or give themselves to vanity and folly; and so load themselves with thick clay that they cannot rise, and then

blame God and religion for it, concluding that grace has either lost its virtues, or was never meant to work the same in them as in the saints of old. It is a sad and ruinous mistake. God is the same; Christ is the same; the Holy Ghost is the same; humanity is the same; the promises are the same; but people's hearts are unbelieving, selfish, earthy, and hence their disability and spiritual wretchedness.

How then are we to renew our strength and enter into the full power and blessedness of our religion? The text very plainly tells us. They are the strong ones who "*wait upon the Lord.*"

Important things are included in this simple and beautiful phrase. It implies a deep and pervading sense of our own unfaithfulness, guilt, and need. It implies a firm confidence in the power and grace of God and His willingness to help us. It implies the letting go of what is contrary to Him and earnest seeking unto Him as our only hope and strength. It means a waiting on Him for instruction and guidance, with a heart willing to hear and obey, as the pupil waits upon his teacher, and as a servant waits upon his master. It means a diligent and devout attendance upon His appointments and ordinances by and through which He gives His Spirit and builds up His people in faith and communion with Himself. It means a persevering obedience to His word and patient waiting for the fulfilment of all that He hath spoken.

And in such a disposition of ourselves the prom-

ises are great and assuring. All who thus "wait upon the Lord *shall renew their strength.*" The doubtful and timid heart will find confirmation, courage, and confidence. Views of truth and duty will become clear and decided. The affections will cease to waver and be more definitely and warmly fixed on things above. The whole purpose of the spiritual man will become more concentrated, vigorous, and determined. Temptations will lessen and lose power. Ability to see and withstand wrong will be increased. And a strength and decision of character will be developed that cannot be swayed or fail to produce steady consistency of life and influence for good and blessedness.

They who thus wait upon the Lord shall also "*mount up with wings as eagles.*" It is the nature of piety to lift and exalt. There is something in it to release the spirit, to give it wings for heavenward ascensions, far above the vexations and attractions of this present world. Christ having ascended into heaven, the minds and hearts of His faithful people ascend with Him, and anticipate the time when they shall reach the same exalted heights. The wings on which they rise are the wings of faith, and love, and blessed hope. Waiting upon the Lord, we realize that we belong to a heavenly kingdom,—that our proper home is above the clouds,—and that presently Our Lord will come to take us thither.

Furthermore, they that wait upon the Lord shall be wonderfully facilitated in their race.

"*They shall run and not be weary.*" They will not feel it a hardship to hold on their way as Christians. They will not grow tired of their profession or their faith. There will come an ever-increasing inspiration to animate their souls and lighten their steps. Whatever there may be to weaken or discourage, there is always enough to quicken and exhilarate, and to give courage for ever new attempts till the goal is won. There is no such thing as exhaustion in those who have come into the full spirit of faith and waiting on God. Their heart is in their religion, and the Spirit so helps their infirmities that they never feel fatigue in the work of gaining heaven. They are enabled to run without becoming weary, and to walk without becoming faint. Persuaded and satisfied as to what awaits them in the end, they hold on their way, ever rejoicing, ever growing, and ever safe.

Let it then, dear friends, be the first, the highest, and the constant aim of our lives *to wait upon the Lord*. In His house, in His ordinances, in hopeful dutifulness in what pertains to us as Christians, let us wait on Him. This is the way to strengthen our souls. This will elevate us above the turmoil, adversities, and distractions that surround us here. This will bring us into closest fellowship with the heavenly powers and arm us with ability to overcome in the day of trial. And thus, when He upon whom we wait shall come, we shall be found of Him in peace and rest with Him for ever.

The Adorable Godhead.

Trinity Sunday.

For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.—ROM. 11: 36.



NO subject is so overwhelming to the human understanding as the Being and Nature of God. It is too high, too deep, too unsearchable for the mind of man to compass. Though at the base of all things, all religion, all right thinking, it opens out into boundless realms and depths which will require all eternity to explore.

Yet there are some things which we can know, and which we need to know, and to have ever present to our minds, that we may rightly adjust ourselves to our place in the universe, and so make the best of our lives.

Whether we can fully understand it or not, it is evident to our consciousness, assumed in Revelation, and sustained by all just reason, that there is, and necessarily must be, an original and almighty Being, greater in all directions than the whole created universe. This is so deeply inlaid in the whole framework of our nature, and so accordant with all its instincts and mental activities,

that the denial of it comes upon the soul like a cyclone, tearing up all that is deepest rooted in its consciousness and most vital to its peace.

In logical consistency this Eternal Source of all things, whom we call GOD, is *one*,—an individual and indivisible Essence ;—for there cannot be more than One Almighty, One Supreme. Even those who have distributed their worship among “lords many and gods many” still held to the thought of One Almighty and Supreme God. And Paul expressed the teaching of all holy prophets when he said, “Though there be that are called gods, to us *there is but One God.*”

Nevertheless, the Scriptures teach that there is, in this One Supreme and Almighty God, something of a plural or complex manner of being and manifestation. Hence arises what we call the doctrine of the Trinity, to the contemplation of which the appointment of this day invites us.

There is what is called God, *the Father*. There is what is called God, *the Son*. And there is what is called God, *the Holy Ghost*. And these *Three*, while distinguishable in some respects from each other, are nevertheless *One*,—a Threeness in One, and a Oneness in Three ; that is to say, a Three One, or Triune God ; as all proper Christians believe and confess concerning the infinite and unsearchable object of their faith and worship.

It is not our belief that the *Three* are *One* in precisely the same sense that they are *Three*. The structure of our minds could not take in such

an arithmetical contradiction. Our doctrine on this mysterious and unsearchable subject is that God is *One* in the sense to which we give the confused name of *Substance*, or *Essence*; and that He is *Three* in a sense to which we give the imperfect name of *Person*. We cannot fully define or determine what is this *Substance*, nor what is this *Personality*. The subject reaches too far beyond human terms or conceptions to do more than dimly indicate the truth. Some have attempted to explain and define, but have found themselves launched upon a sea without bottom or shore, the same as in all attempts to tell what God is. It is like the child in St. Augustine's dream trying to dip the ocean dry with its little cup. The most, the clearest, and the best that the Church has been able to say on this profound subject appears in what is called the Athanasian Creed, where we read :

“The true Christian faith is this : that we worship One God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity ; neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance. For there is One Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost ; but the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all One, the Glory Equal, the Majesty Coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost : the Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate ; the Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible ; the Father

eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three Eternals, but One Eternal. As also there are not three uncreated, nor three incomprehensibles, but One uncreated and One incomprehensible; so likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty; and yet they are not three Almighties, but One Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but One God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Ghost is Lord; and yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian Verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord: so are we forbidden by the true Christian Religion to say there be three Gods, or three Lords."

And as to the distinction between the Persons in the one Godhead, the same Confession further says:

"The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but *begotten*. The Holy Ghost is of the Father, and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but *proceeding*. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another; but the whole three Persons are coeternal together, and coequal: so that in all things, as

aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped."

And yet, with all, who can fathom these depths? Who can penetrate the inscrutable Mystery?

But why should reason stagger at the presentation of Unity in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. Throughout all nature we find it written on nearly everything. "Like begetteth like, and the great sea of existence in each of its uncounted waves holdeth up a mirror to its Maker. Like begetteth like, and the spreading tree of being, with each of its trefoil leaves, pointeth at the Trinity of God."

It is from the Scriptures alone that we get the doctrine of the Trinity. The proofs of it do not rest on deductions of reason, or on any mere analogies of nature. But when people come with their rationalistic talk of contradictions and absurdities, it is our right to point out triune things in nature, and to demand of them to show how this could be, as we find in actual fact, before allowing their arguments against the triunity of God. Nor need we go far to find instances enough of three in one, and one in three.

Consider for example the sun in the heavens, deluging and warming the earth with the glory of its beautiful light. In that grand luminary we observe a great material orb, light radiating from that orb, and a warming heat emitted through those rays of light. Here are three things, distinguishable from each other, and yet these three are inseparably one. The sun viewed as an orb

is one thing, with its own distinct properties; the light sent forth from it is another, also with distinct properties; and the warmth from that light is still another, with other properties; and each separately and the three conjointly are called the sun. A man contemplating the grand centre of our planetary system calls it the sun. Right. Another stands where the rays of sunshine pour down upon him, and he says he is standing in the sun. Right again. Another comes in oppressed with the solar heat, and he says, the sun is hot; and he also is right. The mind readily discriminates between these three things; and yet they are not three suns, but one sun. They are not all the same. They are quite distinguishable. And yet they are one and the same sun.

Consider man himself, designated in the Scriptures as eminently "the image of God." And what is he but a trinity,—a three in one? The Apostle describes him as body, soul, and spirit,"—physical corporiety, life, and a thinking and willing intelligence. Here are three, and these three are one. Taken separately, we speak of each as *man*, the same as when taken together. We speak of a tall, handsome, deformed, or strong *man*, when thinking only of the body; of a talented, intelligent, or stupid *man*, with only his mind in view; and we say the *man* is dead when thinking only of the discontinuance of his animal life. But, they are not three men, but one man,—a trinity in unity. Nor are these mere isolated instances.

Matter, and breath, and instinct unite in all the beasts of the field;
Substance, coherence, and weight fashion the fabrics of the earth;
The will, the doing, and the deed combine to frame a fact;
The stem, the leaf, and the flower; beginning, middle, and end;
Cause, circumstance, consequent; and every three is one.
Yea, the very breath of man's life consisteth of a trinity of vapors,
And the noonday light is a compound, the triune shadow of Jehovah.

The crust of the earth is a triple unity of primary, secondary, and tertiary stratifications. A modern chemist finds all matter a unity of attraction, repulsion, and vitality. A late attempt to give "a basic outline of universology," comprises the whole unity of things in three,"—"unism, duism, and trinism." And even the spherity of the material worlds is but the clothing of the triangle, the symbol of the Trinity of God.

Religion itself is a trinity,—a knowing, a doing, and an experience; and these three are one.

It is the great glory of Christianity that it stands between an abstract, cold and heartless Deism and an idolatrous polytheism, completing what is wanting in the one, correcting what is false in the other, and rendering effective and profitable the better conceptions of both. It calls away from the altars of a plurality of gods, and lifts the soul to the One eternal; yet that Eternal in a threefold aspect, showing the stream of an infinite Love from the Father in our creation, from the Son in our redemption, and from the Holy Ghost in our renewal and sanctification. Nor is it possible to enter into the full understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the love

of God, apart from faith in what is embraced in the doctrine of the Trinity, which includes the proper Deity of Christ and the Personality of the Holy Ghost. And whatever seeming contradiction there may be in it, and however confusing it may be to our poor understanding, the Church and the world can ill afford to reject it.

The question may be asked, Why trouble ourselves with a doctrine so deep, so hard to comprehend, and so much in controversy? Some think it makes no great matter whether we believe and hold to it, or lay it aside as beyond our concern. Alas, it is a sad and perilous thing for a Christian so to conclude. All proper hopes for man rest upon the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity. It underlies the whole substance of saving faith. To throw it out is to emasculate Christianity. Reject the doctrine of the Trinity, and Jesus is no longer a Saviour in the sense of the Scriptures, and cannot be accepted as able to save unto the uttermost. Put aside the doctrine of the Trinity, and you brand all worship of Christ as wicked idolatry, deny that there is any atoning merit in His blood, and repudiate Him as an impostor who had the temerity to make himself equal with God. Deny the doctrine of the Trinity, and you necessarily discredit a large part of the most precious things in the Bible, and demand a revision and material rescission of its language and contents from the first verse of Genesis to the Amen of the Revelation. And so long as it is of any account to us to hold fast our hope and

consolation in a Divine Saviour, trusting for redemption through His blood, we cannot afford to let go, or even to think lightly of, the doctrine of the 'Triunity of God.

And what if there are depths and altitudes in it beyond the reach of our plodding capacity? What if we cannot take into our feeble understanding the how or the possibility of it? God is the highest, the most inscrutable, the most hidden, and the most unknowable to man of any being in the universe; and we can just as easily comprehend His Triunity, as we can understand how He can fill immensity and eternity, or be present at every point in all time and space with all the fullness of His infinite being. We do not yet half know ourselves. Who can form a comprehensible estimate of a mind, a soul, a spirit, or how the ego within us is connected with the house in which it lives, or with the machinery through which it acts! What right then have we to undertake to decide what is possible or impossible in the nature and conditions of infinite and self-existent Godhead?

I find no fault with Revelation because of its mysteries. It is what sound reason would expect. In the very nature of the case it could not be otherwise. A divine Revelation without mysteries, or a God who does not transcend man's comprehension, is to be discredited and rejected. And though I cannot look so far into the secrets of eternal Godhead as to be able to understand and tell how and why the object of my profound-

est adoration is a Trinity, it would be the height of presumption for me on that account to insist on an expurgation of the Bible. Why should I, a worm of to-day, quarrel with Eternal Majesty for revealing Himself as One in Three any more than fault Him for making the sun so glorious that I cannot look into its noonday blaze with naked eye? Nay, I praise Him the more for giving me the intimations of such everlasting progress in intellectual and spiritual growth and expansion in the explorations of His Being, His attributes, and His works.

Let us then, dear friends, humble our proud reason before *Him*, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things. Accepting the Scriptures as His Revelation, let us be content to receive and hold fast its statements, much as they may confound our capacity to explain them. It is well to follow our reason where we have no better guide; but when we have a word from Heaven it is better still to bring our thinking into captivity to a large and unquestioning faith. The sacred Scriptures plainly teach us that there is a Father who is God, a Son who is God, and a Holy Ghost who is God; but that there are not three Gods, but one God. We are abundantly assured that divine compassion has been felt for us in the Father-heart in heaven; that the same has been manifested in the incarnation and mediatorial work of Jesus; and that it is rendered effectual to our salvation by the operations of the Holy Ghost. On this let us confidently rest, and

thereon build our hopes. And if we err in so doing, we err with the great congregation of Christian believers on earth and in heaven, and may feel sure we shall not be condemned for honoring the Son, even as we honor the Father.

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord,
God of hosts, eternal King,
By the Heavens and earth adored,
Angels and archangels sing
Chanting everlastingly
To the blessed Trinity.

Alleluia! Lord to Thee,
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Three in One, and One in Three,
Join me with the heavenly host,
Singing everlastingly
To the blessed Trinity.

A Faithful Servant.

First Sunday after Trinity.

His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.—MATT. 25 : 23.



HIS was one of the servants in the Saviour's Parable of the Talents, where He compares the kingdom of heaven to a man travelling into a far country, who called his servants and delivered unto them his goods, giving to each a certain number of talents with which to trade and get gain until he should return.

The servants of those times were mostly persons captured in war, and often were people of intelligence, skill, and business capacity. Except that their lords had property in them, and had the right to command them, they were not at all to be confounded with the slaves with which we used to be familiar. Nor was it uncommon for one and another of these ancient masters to let out their money or properties to the sole management and control of their servants to do business for the mutual profit of owner and servant. And it is a servant of this description that is here in view.

The Saviour would teach us that it is after this manner He deals with us as His servants. All men are His; but He does not hold nor force them as slaves. He does not lash them to their tasks. He gives them liberty of action. He lets or delivers to them certain talents, which they are free to use as they deem best, only that they must account to Him for them in the end.

This servant had been entrusted with five talents, a very large sum of money. It was double the amount given to another servant, and five to one of what was given to a third.

God does not give to every one alike. There are often very wide diversities. Some are rich and some are poor. Some have much and others have but little. And yet these distributions are not arbitrary or capricious. They are made on a just principle,—“to every man according to his several ability.” Each gets as much as he can handle.

These “talents” include all our endowments, faculties, powers, possessions, and means and opportunities for profiting ourselves and others, and for securing gain for the great Master. There are diversities of gifts. “To one is given the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge; to another, faith; to another, the gift of healing; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, the discerning of spirits; to another, divers kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues.” And as with these spiritual gifts, so in respect to

natural capacity, culture, fortune, office, relations, and positions in the world; all of which are parcelled out according to the divine will and goodness. And all these together constitute the talents with which the great Master has entrusted us.

This servant made good use of what he had received. It was meant that he should use these talents and trade with them, and he did it.

And this is what our Lord intends for us to do with our gifts and talents. Whether they be great or small, many or few, they are meant for active, earnest, and gainful use. The Lord in giving them means *business*,—honest, resolved, faithful, and soul-engaging business. When parents give their children capital, it is not that they may waste it, bury it, or throw it away on idle prodigality; but that they may go into business with it, invest it in profitable trade, make their fortunes out of it, and be able to give a good account of it to the credit and joy of all concerned. And so the divine command with regard to the pounds and talents given us is: "*Occupy till I come*,"—use them, work out of them all the profit you can.

Just what sort of business this servant did is not told; nor is it prescribed to us precisely how and where we are to lay hold in order to make the most of our talents. In general, the opportunities lie all around us, in such spheres of life as Providence has assigned us, or to which He seems to be calling us. We are where we are, and have what we have, that we may act and do profitable

service for Christ and ourselves. As pastors, teachers, parents, Churchmen, learners, professionals, business men, and masters and members of homes, we all have the openings for good, usefulness and gain near at hand, and can make much out of them by proper diligence and fidelity. In a measure we may choose our fields, spheres, and methods of operation; and a true religious, honest, and dutiful spirit in such offices and relations will never fail to yield us honorable gain. The great matter is, to be true to God and duty.

This man was pronounced a "good and faithful servant;" that is, he had well filled his position. He was minded to do his best for his lord; and he did it. He was willing, thoughtful, conscientious, diligent, earnest, and persevering. He felt that he had work to do, and responsibilities to meet; and he gave himself to them in good earnest. In the nature of things, his career was not all sunshine. He had his difficulties, perplexities, disappointments, and reverses, as all people in this world have; but he was not therefore disheartened. He pressed on through fair weather and through bad. He did not give up because things were not always to his mind. He believed in the goodness of his lord. He knew what the master expected of him. And he kept at it without faltering, surrender, or despair. With cheerful alacrity he held on his way, doing the best in his power, and never falling out with his duty.

And this is what the Lord expects of us. He

demands no impossibilities, and has covenanted that His grace shall be sufficient for us in all emergencies, if only we are true to Him. But sloth, negligence, and indifference to our duty and calling He will not and cannot honor. We are not responsible for what we cannot do; but "he that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." There was one servant who hid his talent and let it lie unused, having made nothing out of it, murmuring perhaps that he had not as others had. But he fared badly in the end. A lazy, unwilling, or fault-finding soul can never hope for the Lord's commendation. There are people on whose tombstones it may be written: "Here lies the man who never did an hour's work for God in all his life." Men may be very active and energetic in affairs of this world, but all for self and self, and never in the way of dutifulness to Him who has given them the power to do. Neither the slothful, the careless, the selfish, nor any mere Mammon-worshippers, can be called the Lord's good and faithful servants; nor yet those who do well for a time and then drop off, or do only in some things while others are left.

This servant was held accountable for his talents. It was "a long time" before his lord came back from his journeyings; but he came; and when he came it was to receive account of what had been done with his money. And so it is appointed unto us. Our Lord *will* call every one to account for the manner in which we have dealt with His gifts and graces, whether rich or poor.

He means to reward the faithful and honor their fidelity; but He must first see whether they have duly appreciated His kindness, and with what sort of activity and temper they have dealt toward Him. Hence, He "*reckoneth with them*," not in the way of harsh and severe arraignment, as culprits to be punished; but as servants whom He is anxious to reward and bless. The day of judgment is not meant to distress us, harm us, or make our comforts less. There is no judgment unto condemnation to those who are in Christ; nevertheless there must be inquiry respecting our fidelity and works, on which our rewards depend. A school examination may be a time of anxiety to the pupils; but it is not for their disturbance or disadvantage. It is simply to ascertain their progress in learning, and their fitness for advancement, for which they have meanwhile been candidates. And so it is with Christ's reckoning with His servants. It is for our promotion and greater joy, and not for our grief.

The inquest will, indeed, necessarily be strict, impartial, and just. Nothing can be kept back, —nothing can be hid. People may wonder how the lives and deeds of so many myriads on myriads can be so minutely examined; but there will be no difficulty in the case. Everything concerning every one is fully written on each one's own soul, and a single glance from the Lord will read and reveal every item. There can be no shams, no trickery, no misrepresentation, no disguises, no mistakes. Every one's whole life will stand open,

and what each has been doing with his talents will appear. There can be no concealment or equivocation. And as the facts are, so will the award of our Lord and Judge be.

People generally think of that time, if they think of it at all, with some degree of alarm and terror. The best of us have been such unprofitable servants that we naturally fear to be called to account. But it is necessary and part of the process to bring us to glory. All our occupying and doing for our Lord would be a bootless drudgery, if He were never to come again to take account of us, and to adjudge to us our promised reward. Our faith and devotion would have no outcome, no crown, without this. The gladdest day this servant ever had was the day his lord returned,—even the day of reckoning. Often had he been in doubt and danger by reason of his infirmities and failures. Many had been his anxieties, his trials, his straits, his discouragements. But he had faith in the goodness of his Lord ; and when tempted to despond he rallied to the music of the promises, and held on even in his tears. And now, at last, his Lord came ; and with holy boldness and joy he hastened to meet Him, his heart bounding with delight and words of exultation bursting from his lips : “ Lord, thou deliverdest unto me five talents ; behold, I have gained besides them five talents more.”

And so it shall be with all who truly love the Saviour, and are honestly set to serve Him. Believing in Him, working for Him, and awaiting

His coming, the final meeting will be one of triumphant gladness. And then shall come the blessed commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Dear friends, a blessed assurance is thus given us. No faith in Jesus shall ever be disappointed. No efforts, labors, gifts, sacrifices, or sufferings,—no prayers, tears, sighs, or loving anxieties for Him and His cause,—shall ever be lost. Their record is on high. They are all treasured in heaven. And not so much as the gift of a cup of cold water given in His Name and for His sake shall lose its reward.

And that reward! How does it here loom up before us! How vastly does it transcend the best that any one can do to deserve it! The measure of it is not the greatness of the work we have done, but the faith and fidelity with which we have done the little that is within our power. It is the faithfulness over the few things that brings rulership over many things. The mercenary spirit is not the true Christian spirit. Not for wages nor reward, but out of love and devotion to our Lord and His cause we are to serve Him. Nevertheless, where such love is the motive reward will come,—reward far beyond the desert of our doing. True and loving service carries joy and blessedness in itself. Where that exists and controls there is always an inward satisfaction, of which nothing can deprive the soul. But beyond this

is the approval and commendation of the Lord, and glad welcome into His own joy, with promise of rulership and dominion.

The holiest and most useful will, of course, rise the highest and share the most. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." But for the weakest and the poorest, if faithful in doing for the Master the best they can, there is blessedness eternal.

Difference in Worshippers.

Second Sunday after Trinity.

Two men went up into the temple to pray ; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.—LUKE 18 : 10.



THESE two men were both religiously moved. They both honored the divine ordinances and appointments. And they both desired God's favor and blessing. They both "went up to the temple to pray." So far they both acted commendably, and furnish us an example to be followed. Neglecting the temple and the services God has ordained, we cannot count on His favor. We cannot have the benefit of God's house if we go not to it, or give no attention to those things for which it has been established. When God institutes ordinances He requires their observance.

But the mere formalities of religion are not enough. Both these men went up to the temple to pray, and they both stood and prayed ; but one of them went down to his house justified, and the other did not. If anything, the one who was the most punctilious was the least favored. Rites, ceremonies, and outward observances are nothing if unaccompanied with a right heart and a right spirit.

There may also be qualities that speak well for a man, and yet not avail to recommend him to the divine favor. This Pharisee was an outwardly respectable and moral person. He was not extortionate or unjust in his business,—not an adulterer,—not backward in paying his debts. He was what the world would call a reputable and worthy man,—a good citizen.

He was also quite religious in his way. He practised certain austerities and disciplined his body in strict sanctimoniousness. He fasted twice in a week, which was even more than the law required of him.

He was also a prompt and conscientious supporter of the Church. He gave tithes of all that he possessed, the full tenth of all the products of his fields, cattle, and investments. He also felt that he had much for which to thank God, and for which he did give thanks after his fashion. He was likewise interested in the morals of men around him, and very severe on all injustice, dissoluteness, and irregularity. People who did not come up to his standard had to hear from him and feel his censorship.

But with all this he was an unapproved worshipper. His chaste and regular life was not against him; for no one can be a true worshipper who is not made up to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present evil world. But with so much that was favorable in his case he was not accepted. It takes more than respectability and outward morality to make a child of God.

What, then, was the trouble? Certainly not that he was outwardly virtuous and religious, but that he was one of those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others."

He could not agree to accept place with common worshippers. He was so pure and holy in his own esteem that he could not stand anywhere near the publican who entered the temple with him. He must stand apart by himself. He was a Pharisee; and both the spirit and name of the Pharisees said, "Stand aside, for I am holier than thou." It was not that he *stood* to pray, for the other man also *stood*; but it was his Pharisaic self-righteousness that would not let him stand with other people, lest his superior holiness should be contaminated.

His prayer itself showed the same characteristic. He thanked God. That was a very proper and right thing to do. A religion which has no thanksgiving in it is of poor account. We are to "give thanks always for all things unto God." But thanksgiving may easily run into self-laudation and vain boasting. And so it was in this case. There was no giving of God the glory, but the taking of it all to himself. Under the form of thanking God, he merely recited his own praises and paraded his own virtues. The biggest and most pervading thing in it was the large *I*,—*I* am so and so,—*I* do so and so,—*I* fill out the conditions of righteousness,—*I* am not a sinner like other men. And if there is one thing more

offensive to God than another, it is such spiritual pride, egotism, and self-commendation. Had this man been as good and pious as he professed, he would have devoutly ascribed it all to the grace of God, and humbly acknowledged that he was nothing in himself; for it is only by the abounding goodness and grace of God that any of us are any better than the base and wicked around us.

And with such a lofty, proud, and self-complacent spirit there goes also an uncharitable censoriousness and contempt of others. Hence this Pharisee's prayer was as full of ill-natured comparisons and accusations of other men as it was of self-flattery and spiritual self-exaltation. Dwelling supremely on his own pieties, he could see nothing but baseness in any one else. Other people were only licentious profligates in the eyes of such exalted saintship. His brother worshipper he scorned to acknowledge as of the same flesh and blood with himself. Even in his prayer he made a personal thrust at the poor publican, and condemned him in most unfeeling harshness. And if any consider themselves too good to kneel at the same altar with other people, and cannot worship God without supercilious judging of their fellow-worshippers, they may set it down that they are in no condition to profit by their devotions.

This publican may not have been as good and honest a man as he should have been. Men of his profession in general had a bad reputation for extortion and unjust exactions; and he may not

have been quite clean of these wrongdoings. But there is nothing to show that he was any worse than people in general. He revered God and religion. He came to the temple for holy worship, the same as the Pharisee. He was just as devoutly anxious to possess the favor of God as any one else. And if it had been in his heart to do it, he might readily have retorted upon the Pharisee after the same style and spirit. It is not a safe thing for people who live in glass houses to throw stones. Had the Publican been so minded, he might have said: "God I thank thee that I am not as some men are, conceited, proud, uncharitable, censorious, and malignant, or even as this Pharisee. I do not boast of my virtues. I do not cast malevolent flings at other people. If I am a sinner, I can have sympathy and mercy for other sinners who feel their guilt and are earnestly seeking God's forgiveness." But such was not his mind nor temper. Whether the Pharisee was a holy man or not, he would not undertake to decide. He knew that he himself was anything but holy. If his life had not been one of daring wickedness, he nevertheless felt himself far short of deserving anything but God's just condemnation. Other men might be sinners; but that was not for him to say. They might be proud, deceitful, hypocritical, arrogant, and full of offensive self righteousness; but to God they must answer; he would not be their judge. He had his own soul's safety to look after and not the faults of others. Not his virtues and goodness, but his

sins were the things he had to do with. If others condemned him, his condemnation of himself was deeper. For aught he knew, others might be holy and deserving of heaven; but as to himself he felt that he was not, and that without God's merciful consideration there was no hope for him.

Here was a spirit the very opposite of that of the Pharisee, and showing itself in every particular. The contrast is perfect. The Pharisee came up to the temple and walked boldly to the most conspicuous place, as if it were his by right. The Publican came with holy fear and trembling. He scarcely dared to adventure within the threshold. He "stood afar off," as not worthy to have place among God's worshippers. The Pharisee spread forth his hands in ostentatious self-consequence. The Publican did not "lift up so much as his eyes to heaven." The Pharisee with lofty countenance told the Lord of his goodness, his morality, his piety, and his worthy deeds. Downcast and oppressed in soul, the Publican had nothing to tell about himself but his unworthiness and sins. The Pharisee stood looking up with unruffled self-satisfaction. The Publican was so mortified and full of self-reproach that "he smote upon his breast," as totally fallen out with himself, and aching in spirit over his guiltiness before God. The Pharisee proclaimed himself a spotless saint. The Publican profoundly lamented that he was nothing but a sinner, the same as if he were the only sinner in the world. The Pharisee

censured and condemned everybody but himself. The Publican blamed and condemned nobody but himself. The Pharisee's prayer was no prayer at all. It asked for nothing. The man was already so perfect that he felt no need. The Publican's prayer *was* prayer, pure and simple. It was all looking, depending, impleading with a God-ward earnestness which could offer nothing, rest on nothing, expect nothing, but what God in His merciful goodness might bestow. The Pharisee gave a long harangue about his own superiority. The Publican, in the depths of compunction and grief, could only say, "*God be merciful to me a sinner!*" The Pharisee rested upon his own righteousness for acceptance and justification. The Publican only pleaded guilt and the propitiation God's mercy hath provided. He looked for help and salvation only through the altar of sacrifice; for the full rendering of his prayer would be: "*God, be propitiated to me, the sinner!*" It was God's merciful forgiveness that he so humbly entreated; but he had no thought of receiving it except through the blood of atonement. And thus, while the Pharisee trusted to his own virtues and worth, the Publican was thoroughly evangelic in his faith and hope, and laid hold on the only availing righteousness.

The results in these two cases may be readily anticipated.

Many would be glad to have the feeling of conscious rectitude in which this Pharisee indulged, and would rejoice to be able to say that no extor-

tion, injustice, or lewdness had ever touched their lives,—that they had been strict in their respect and attention to God's ordinances,—that they could lay claim to a purity and righteousness such as he boasted. But what could that help him when so self-sufficient that he had nothing more to ask. Had he been able to claim for himself far greater things than he named, his pride and uncharity were enough to cause his utter rejection. For though a man should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, have the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries and all knowledge, bestow all his goods to feed the poor, have faith to remove mountains, and even give his body to be burned in sacrifice, and have no real love and charity in his heart, it cannot weigh a particle to recommend him to the favor and benediction of God. Morality and good works alone are not religion. Justifying ourselves is certain to meet with God's condemnation. Those who make their own righteousness their dependence find no occasion for divine mercy, and hence cannot have it. Accordingly this man, with all his morality and devotion, went down to his house unjustified and unsaved.

On the other hand, this despised and sin-burdened Publican was accepted and blessed. His life may have been in many respects irregular, and many might regard him as a morbid enthusiast for being so anxious about his sins; but he was honest; he was humble; he was contrite; he threw himself upon the only plea that man has to

avail before God; he earnestly prayed that he might find mercy; and God heard his prayer and honored his devotion. He was accepted, and went down to his house justified. His humble penitence took hold on the divine compassion, and from the depths of his self-condemnation he was lifted to the status of an approved child of God.

Such, then, is the teaching given us in this text; and easily enough can its application be discerned. If we would come acceptably before God in His holy ordinance, bringing with us a good and regular life is altogether desirable; but we dare not come with the proud, self-righteous, and censorious spirit of this Pharisee. At the best we are very sinful beings, and much greater sinners than we know; and we must never for a moment think otherwise. And yet, to congratulate ourselves that we are not as this Pharisee, is after all to be like him, and to involve ourselves in his fatal mistake. In our own righteousness we cannot stand, and only the mercy of God in Christ Jesus can avail for us. The moment we begin to think that now we are fit and worthy, we render ourselves unfit and unworthy. We are poor sinners all; without any claim whatever upon God's favor; and in that character, and feeling that such is our character, must we come, if we would be accepted.

But though we be sinners, corrupt in nature and derelict in practice and life, our sins are no barrier, if we come in the right spirit. It was

not the righteous, but *sinner*s Jesus came to call. The Publican, in all his sins, is as welcome as the holiest Pharisee, if he only will come in the right way, penitently confessing his sins, praying earnestly for God's merciful forgiveness through the blood of atonement, and made up to forsake the sins he confesses. To this man Jehovah says He will look, even to him who is of an humble and contrite spirit, and trembleth at His word. To be thinking that we are not as bad as other people, will not do. Neither will it answer to comfort ourselves that we are free from gross offences against the law, and have in the general observed the outward precepts of religion. It is good if our lives have been virtuous; but we can by no means justify ourselves, and nothing but a contrite and honest acknowledgment of our sinfulness, and an humble throwing of ourselves on God's mercy in Christ Jesus, will bring us His benediction.

And especially must we avoid censorious judging of our fellow-worshippers, as if we were so much better than they, and of too much consequence to be reckoned as helpless sinners. Human nature is apt to be severe with others while very lenient to itself; but the Saviour calls this hypocrisy. If we are better than others, we damage our claim to it by exulting over them or seeking to keep them down. Our duty is rather to pity them, to pray for them, and to help them to the better. It is enjoined upon us not to judge, that we be not judged. And if we would be God's

children indeed, it pertains to us to be severe upon our own faults, and forbearing and forgiving toward those of others, remembering that condescension and charity are better than sacrifice, and that he who exalteth himself shall be abased.

The Sinner's Friend.

Third Sunday after Trinity.

And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.—LUKE 15 : 2.

IT was not a false accusation which these people brought against Jesus. It was true that many unsavory characters did flock around Him; that He did receive them kindly, and did accept invitations to their homes and hospitalities.

He was in all respects a very marvellous man, and an attractive preacher. There was something in His manner, in His sympathies, in His teachings, in His whole spirit that greatly impressed and captivated the masses. Even those whom society discarded,—the sinful, the condemned, and the outcast,—were drawn to Him. They saw in Him a new style of goodness, which commended itself to their judgment, touched their hearts, disarmed their resentment, and cheered their souls. They saw in Him what commanded their interest, their respect, their confidence. Though pure and holy, He seemed closer to them than they had supposed a holy being could come. Hence their drawing to Him.

And He welcomed their approaches. He took them up into His own deep sympathies. They felt that He felt for them; and many, whose seared consciences answered to no other touch, realized in Him the presence of a new power and yielded to it.

The self-righteous Pharisees were not attracted. They thought themselves too good to need His help, and were in no state of mind to value His favors. On the contrary, they despised His pretensions and teachings, and were offended and scandalized that He should bestow consideration upon sinners and outlaws, and showed so little regard for the excellent manners, legal purity, high repute, and decorous conversation of these self-exalted religionists.

But Christ's reception of sinners was not of a sort to make light of their sins. It was not true that He preferred the evil to the good. He received sinners, indeed, and ate with them, but only that He might teach them better ways, recover them from condemnation, and cleanse them from their sins. He was kind and merciful to them, because they felt their need of His sympathy and help to lift them to a better life. He called sin, sin, and guilt, guilt; but He was moved and filled with pitying mercy for the marred and miserable who were longing for deliverance.

And why should it not have been so? Surely such tenderness well befitted Him who came to be their Saviour. Nor did He fail to show the propriety of His conduct in this. He *did* receive

sinners, and eat with them. He *did* manifest pity and commiseration for the despised and wretched. He did hold himself open to be visited by the wicked, the base, and the unclean. Nor did He ever weary in His efforts to serve, comfort, and bless all who came unto Him. But there was ample justification for it. A few simple and homely parables were enough to put His accusers to shame. His conduct, after all, was in strict accord with the principles that govern in the common affairs of life.

When but one out of the hundred of a shepherd's flock has strayed away, doth he not leave the ninety and nine to seek and recover it? When a woman misses one of her ten pieces of money, does she not search diligently for it, and show gladness in regaining it? What true-hearted father would not welcome his prodigal son when he returns in humble penitence, though ragged, reeking, and repulsive from his guilt? And why should not the merciful Saviour, sent to save the wandering, lost, and erring, cheerfully receive wandering souls when they come with broken hearts, seeking pardon and restoration!

It is a bereavement and calamity to lose what we value and love. It is a sore loss and sorrow when a son turns out a rioting spendthrift and vagabond. And so God, and heaven, and the holy universe, are bereft and damaged by men's sinfulness. So to speak, there is a privation and loss to Heaven inflicted by human apostacy; and there is every reason to wish the mutilation

healed. God loves and values His great flock, and is not willing that even one should be lost. Every member of it is a treasure. The human soul is a precious thing. It is a coin from the mint of heaven. It is stamped with Jehovah's image. It is a thing capacitated for a transcendent destiny. There is vast worth in it for good and profit, the loss of which is great and painful. And as a loving father is wounded and distressed to see his son going to the bad ; so the great heart of God is moved and affected by the ruin of impenitent sinners. He loves them ; He pities them ; He has tender compassion for them ; and is not willing to lose them ; but would that all should come to repentance and live. It is no compensation for their loss that He has so many others left. Other souls and sons cannot satisfy for those that are gone. He might fill their places with new creations, but that could not cover the wound nor modify the calamity. Substituting archangels in their stead would not satisfy the personal interest and affection which infinite Goodness feels for each that He has created and so nobly endowed. It is the crippled and ailing child that lies the nearest to the parental heart ; and where the tragic consequences of sin are most felt and lamented, there the divine compassion is deepest and most active.

Hence the readiness of Jesus to receive and favor sinners. It was not as the defender and patron of their wickedness. It was not to encourage and strengthen them in their evil ways. It

was that he might help them out of their miseries, rescue and new-create their alien hearts to hope and heaven. He had words of comfort for the lowly and the guilty ; He gave himself to companionship with those whom society discarded ; He even dealt tenderly toward the very thralls and worn-out servants of the devil ;—just that He might raise up the fallen, recover the lost, and bring salvation to the perishing. And such a compassionate Saviour Jesus is.

And what a joyous achievement is success in such a work ! Who can begin to tell what vast and eternal good is embraced in the saving of a perishing soul ! Lost, and found,—dead, and made alive again,—snatched from the mouth of hell and lifted to the height of heaven,—what blessedness of meaning is summed up in this ! And if it is so glad a thing to the shepherd to get back one straying sheep, and to the father to have his errant son come home ; what must it be to God and heaven, and all the holy universe, to have such master-pieces of divine creation rescued from the destroyer's grasp, and set up to live and shine as immortal stars in the kingdom of glory ! Aye, says the Saviour, "there is joy in heaven,—joy in the presence of the angels of God,—over one sinner that repenteth ;"—"*more joy* over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance." The sighs and tears of a repentant Magdalene may awaken no interest on earth, or excite only disgust in the proud scribes and Pharisees ; but wait-

ing angels are rejoiced, and the bells of heaven are set a ringing, and the sons of God shout for joy over the new birth of a fellow-heir to a glorious immortality. Nor is there ever a conversion of a sinner on earth but it awakens songs in heaven.

How indeed shall we gauge the satisfaction of Jesus as He beholds the fruits of the travail of His soul! This is an ocean too wide for our gaze to reach across it, and too deep for our fathom line to sound. We cannot know the bitterness of the cup He drank, nor feel the agony that made His pores sweat blood, nor estimate the burden of the cross under which He fainted and on which He died. No, the encyclopedia of Calvary, and the melting lore of dying love, are too profound for our powers to compass. And so it is beyond our reach to measure the heavenly joy over the trophies of that wondrous tragedy.

And when for such glad results the Saviour dealt so graciously toward the guilty and despised, how utterly discordant and shameful the attempt to stigmatize and condemn Him for it! What these people charged and meant for His dishonor was really a most precious encomium. What more cheerful and hopeful to sin-burdened and anxious souls could be said of Him than that "this man receiveth sinners!" And what, alas, would be our fate if this saying were not true?"

A blessed Gospel, therefore, is that which has been thus given us to preach. A compassionate Saviour has come to seek and to save the lost. In


Him there is hope even for the worst. He is here to receive, to pardon, and to bless, if sinful souls will but draw near in humble penitence. His word still is, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Nor is there any other Name under heaven, given among men, whereby to be saved.

What think ye then of Christ? In what esteem do you hold Him? Is it a thing of hopeful joy to you that the guilty and outcast can find favor with Him? Have you felt drawn to Him in loving interest to hear His gracious words and profit by His mercies? Sinners as we all are, has it been yours to make the angels glad by repentance? And if disturbed and troubled by past negligences and sins, be comforted by what this day's Gospel preaches, and rejoice in the blessed truth that "This man receiveth sinners."

Seeking and Finding.

Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

They . . . found Him on the other side of the sea.—JNO. 6 : 25.

T is a great and blessed thing to find Christ. To find Him, is to find the centre of all Christian faith and hope. To find Him, is to find the well-spring of eternal youth. There be many treasures in the world, but none to compare with Jesus, who proposes to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to all those who devoutly come to Him. And He is also to be found of all those who diligently seek Him. In some sense also the world is full of those who seek Him; for He has ever been "The Desire of nations."

But the seekers of Christ are of quite different sorts. Henry Martyn, the missionary, found that the thronging crowds of poor Hindoos that gathered around him every week came more for the bread he was in the habit of distributing among them, than for the Gospel Bread of Life. And so it is with many still. They profess religion, join the Church, or take part with Church people, more for the credit, social standing, or business advantages it may be to them, than for any honest

spiritual profit. What they look at is the worldly gain it may be to them. They have a relish for the loaves and fishes, and this it is that controls their movements. They are eager enough to have Christ as their Prophet and King, if He will prosper their earthly lives, fill their barns and purses, and crown them with temporal good and honor. But when the soul is to be subjugated to righteousness and truth, self-denial and the cross endured, the ardor fails, and the showy zeal expires. When there is to be a feeding of the flesh and its lusts and appetites, or food or money to be given away, there is stir and eagerness enough; but when only spiritual good is to be obtained, and only the Bread of Life is offered, the multitudes turn away, and the altar of God is neglected and forsaken. It is well indeed to be zealous and determined in seeking Christ. It is the only way to eternal salvation. But it must be a seeking of Him as the Saviour of souls.

But to find Christ so as to be to us a personal saving it is often necessary to cross the sea. These people found Him *on the other side of the sea*. A man has sometimes to leave his old way of life and enter a new land to find his fortune. And the same sort of necessity often holds in these spiritual things. There are two sides to life;—a right side and a wrong side; and it is on the wrong side,—the side of sin and condemnation,—that all are born and many continue to live. For such there is no hope but to emigrate, to quit the old life and associations, and to cross

over to the other side, where alone Christ and salvation are to be found.

Between many and the Saviour there is a dark wide sea of unrepented and unforgiven sin, which must be crossed to reach Him. He is indeed willing and ready to receive and save even the worst; but they must consent to part from their old evil ways, leave the shores of desolation, and come to Him on the other side.

It is easy to become badly severed from the shore of safety. If you have stood upon some jutting rocks or timbers close to the water's edge at the incoming tide of the sea, you perhaps remember how imperceptible its approach was. You saw a little shivering spread of thin water running up upon the smooth sand, and some tiny wavelets gliding in only to retire as they came, with nothing to indicate the majesty of the incoming waters, until presently you found yourself cut off from the land by a wide stretch of sea rolling between you and safety. And so it is with sin. The first may be a trifle. We excuse it and say, "Is it not a little one?" But gradually the tide of evil glides in, each little wave followed by another, and every successor coming faster and deeper until, before the person is aware of it, he is surrounded by an ever-widening sea that must be crossed in order to be saved.

What is it, then, that separates so many from Christ, and the peace which is to be found in Him?

With some it is a subtle unbelief and false

philosophy perverting their thinking and swaying them into doubt, skepticism, and a hardened unwillingness to be convinced.

With others it is a cold indifference that puts aside all concern about sacred things and is satisfied so to remain.

With another class it is a deep and all-absorbing selfishness, toiling night and day to win and secure all it can, not caring whom it wrongs, and scrupulous only in refusing to part with anything.

There is also a sea of worldliness and carnal gayety by which many are parted from the Saviour. Their business, their pleasures, their ease, their friends, their vanities fill up their thoughts, occupy their time, and tax their energies so that no room is left for God and attention to the wants of the soul. The deep waters of worldly likes roll between them and salvation.

And there are many well-meaning people who are so taken up with their domestic duties, and have so much upon them, that they are unwillingly kept away from Christ. They would be Christians, and often really long to find the Saviour and His peace; but they are so preoccupied and tied down by adverse and oppressive cares that they excuse and justify themselves in not making the attempt.

But whatever may interpose to keep away from Him in whom alone is pardon and peace, our bounden duty is to set ourselves to overcome it. Necessity is upon us. Without Jesus we are lost. Nor can we ever find Him by lingering on the

barren shores of sin. There needs to be a vigorous combating of carnal indifference, an abandonment of evil ways, and the bold adventure of the soul, by God's grace, to conquer every obstacle, and thus pass over to the side where Jesus is. There must be no holding back for weather,—no timid shrinking because of hindrances and difficulties. He that observeth the wind will not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds will not reap. And however adverse and dark the sea, it must be crossed, if ever people would be with Jesus.

But that Galilean sea symbolizes this present life. Christ has passed over it and is now on the other side. There is a beyond—another side. And these two sides are very different. Here there is toil, and weariness, and trouble, and storms, and darkness. Here we have trials, losses, sicknesses, bereavements, sorrows, tears. It is not so on the other side. There they hunger no more, neither thirst any more. There there is no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things have passed away. There Jesus is in the fullness of His glory and beauty to feast the souls of His people, and to be to them an eternal consolation.

Many in this world have a hard and trying life. They have poverty, and want, and disease, and temptation, and sin to battle with, and must struggle hard to keep the narrow way. People are often so distressed as to lament that ever they

were born. But there is another and better side. This world is not the whole of life, and its griefs and hardships cannot last forever. And where there is honest and faithful Christian endeavor deliverance is not far away. There is rest on the other side.

Some of us may have had to suffer bitter disappointments and cruel wrongs. Though we have had our comforts and blessings, the path through which we have come has been marked with thorns and lined with graves. But if true love and zeal for Jesus has place in our hearts, all these adversities will disappear, and all losses be made up to us in the glory to be revealed on the other side.

Some of us may be going down the decline of life. Daily dimmer may grow our vision. Most of the friends and associates of our youth have gone. And nothing may now remain to us here but a few years of increasing infirmities never to be removed. But this is our comfort, that when the trying voyage of life is over, immortal youth and unfading blessedness await us on the other side.

To all His people the word of Jesus is, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Yes, we shall share His blessedness on the other side.

The Temple Gates.

Fifth Sunday after Trinity.

He that entereth in by the way of the North gate to worship shall go out by the way of the South gate; and he that entereth by the way of the South gate shall go forth by the way of the North gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it. And the Prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and when they go forth, shall go forth. —EZEK. 46: 9, 10.



GATES ajar is a popular poetic image which these words may call to mind. Gates are spoken of,—gates of good and blessing. They are Temple gates,—the gates of entrance into holy worship and fellowship with God.

The first thought suggested in connection with entrance into these gates is, that *Religion is for all in common*,—for high and low alike. They are for the prince and for the people without distinction of rank.

There are many orders and estates in life. Whatever may be men's theories of natural and social equality, the fact remains that class differences cannot be obliterated. There always are, and always will be, older and younger, teachers and pupils, governors and governed, learned and

ignorant, rich and poor, fools and wise. No laws, or legislation, or attempts to level things, can ever make this different. But while these distinctions exist, and often are very deep; before God, all are on the same level and foundation; for God is no respecter of persons. The same Temple gates and ordinances are for all alike. The prince must go with the people, and the people with the prince. There is no exemption for the high and rich because they are high and rich, nor for the humble and poor because they are humble and poor. Worship, devotion, and the service of God are precisely the same for all. In the true divine order, "the rich and the poor meet together," as the one Lord is the Maker of them all.

But God's worshippers *do not all enter the temple from the same quarter*. There is a *north* gate, and a *south* gate;—a side of sunshine, and a side of shade,—and people come in from these opposite sides. Some have good fortune in their affairs, and are peculiarly favored in their estate; and in their case the mercies of God are most potential in drawing them. Many have had good and pious homes in which they grew into pious thinking and pious ways, hardly knowing anything else. They come not with bitter sorrows of repentance, for their consciences have never been corroded by gross immoralities, and they have never lived in unbelief. Their lives have been genial, sunny, and good, the rewards of careful parental and pastoral care and teaching;

and it has ever been their life and joy to love and serve the good Father in heaven. Gently drawn along as by golden cords, they have come into religion's ways amid pleasantness and peace. These enter the temple from the side of sunshine and brightness.

But there is an opposite side,—the side of gloom, darkness, and storms. Great sorrows and adversities, great crimes and terrors of conscience, great disturbances and fears, great perils and judgments, are often the means of bringing careless and wicked people to a change of their ways. Except for some dark providence, some sore bereavement, some heavy affliction or severe reverses, many would never have been moved to piety and faith. Except for lives of profanity and wickedness, the alarms awakened by Jehovah's threatenings, the sharp disasters that came near consuming them, many would never have come to think of God nor to seek His mercy. The hand of almighty power often strikes in upon the peace of guilty souls, breaks up their nests, shows them the yawning gulf, and through fiery trials brings them to themselves and their duty. These come into the temple by way of the north gate,—from the side of shadow, gloom, and darkness.

But from whatever side people enter, *the great matter is to enter.* The gates are made for this purpose. To neglect the temple and worship of God, is to neglect the soul and heaven. To be without God and without hope in the world is an abnormity,—a negation of proper manhood,—

a making light of the superlative work of divine goodness toward our race. There is no merciful God, no hope, no salvation apart from Him who can be approached only through His own ordinances and temple. The gates of the Sanctuary are the gates of hope and salvation, and there is neither for those who refuse to enter them.

And having entered *there must be straightforward progress*. Entering at the north gate there is to be a going through to the south gate; and the same to the north gate from entrance at the south. Many enter the temple-place and come out just where they went in. They make no progress. They do not go through. They begin and then retreat. They go part of the way, but get no further. We see them enter at one gate, but they never get to the other. There is no thoroughness in their religion,—no following on to serve the Lord. They perform some duties, but leave the rest. They make the start, but fail to continue. But God says, "If any man draw back, my soul hath no pleasure in him." Having made the beginning, we must "go on unto perfection." Paul supplied the right example, when, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things that are before, he ever pressed for the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Another thought is, that the *true worship of God does not let us out as we came in*. It is meant to do something for us,—to make us better, stronger, and firmer in our faith and duty. When

Moses was in the mount with God, his face took on a brightness, so that the children of Israel could scarcely endure to look upon it. When men observed certain disciples, they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. Association and fellowship with the divine imprinted its marks. And so our entry into the temple is intended to enlighten, brighten, and burnish our souls,—to clear away the darkness and earthiness of our hearts,—to illuminate and transfigure our natures,—to bring the sorrowing to joy, the troubled to peace, and to prepare the happy for the day of trial. We may not always be able to see the effect, or be fully conscious of it, but the good is there, and continues to deepen as we continue in the sacred communion. Moses did not know his face was shining, and we may not be able to carry away with us the scented waters ; but where they have touched us the pleasant aroma remains upon the soul. Going in with a true heart and a serious mind, we cannot come out as we went in.

A pious life has many ins and outs. There is an *in* to the closet. We need our private devotions,—our retirements from the world ; and to these we must attend. This is one *ingoing*. There is another *ingoing* to the public worship. If we would be right Christians, we dare not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is. People who despise church-going, who do not care whether they hear the preaching of the Word or not, and think they can

do as well by lying at home or wandering about the streets and fields, or by using God's holy day for social visitations, never can have much of the spirit of religion in them. True Christian life calls for a going in to the sanctuary.

There is also a *going in* to the Table of the Lord, to the study of the Scriptures, to frequent self-examinations, and to consideration of what we can do for God and His cause.

All these are *ingoings* in Christian life. But there are also *outgoings*. We cannot always be in the closet, in the place of worship, or in the more formal duties of religion. Neither is it intended that we should. God has arranged for *outgoings* as well as *ingoings*. We go *in* to eat, and rest, and commune, and refresh ourselves; and then we go *out* to employ and put forth the strength which we thus acquire. A right man will always have some employment, and so will have a going out to business, trade, and daily occupation. Hiding away from the world is not Christianity. God means us to take our part in the industries, toils, burdens, and attritions of life. It is this that helps to develop character, strengthen virtue, and promote usefulness. Man is always at his best where he is obliged to work and toil for bread and shelter; and no man can be what he ought to be, if he never goes out in this line of things.

Then there is also a going forth to manifold temptations. God always tries those whom He honors. He puts them to the test, that they may

show what is really in them, and develop their powers of endurance. It may be by adversity, or it may be by prosperity,—it may be by provocations and rough experiences, or it may be by flatteries and soft solicitations,—it may be by taxes on temper, on patience, on endurance, or it may be by exemptions, ease, and a plentiful and sunny life. But, in one way or another we must be tried. As Jesus came out of the waters of Baptism to be tempted of the devil, so we must encounter all sorts of trials and temptations, that we may prove ourselves the true children of God by our victories over them.

And then there are further outgoings in Christian work. Religion is not all hearing of sermons, saying of prayers, and singing of Psalms. There are children to be instructed and trained in religious knowledge and habits. There are sick, and poor, and helpless to be looked after and cared for. There are churches to be built and sustained, ministers to be educated, erring ones to be recovered, people destitute of the means of grace and salvation to be supplied with the word and ordinances, and a thousand interests of the kingdom to be looked after and provided for, requiring labor and self-denial, to which good people must needs go forth.

It is therefore a true picture of Christian life which these *ins* and *outs* suggest.

But in these ingoings and outgoings *God's people have a comforting assurance.* "The Prince is in the midst of them."

Whoever this Prince may be when the prophecy reaches its ultimate fulfilment, we know who is now the Prince of Zion. The King and Head of the Church is the risen and enthroned Jesus. He is the Lord and Prince of all God's people. And He is ever with them,—ever “in the midst of them.” Going *in* or *out*, He is with them.

His word is, that “Where two or three are gathered together in His Name, there He is, in the midst of them.” And all faithful souls know the truth of this.

His Sanctuary is the appointed and special meeting-place between Him and them. Here He breathes upon them, and bestows His Spirit, and shows His wounded hands, and feet, and side, and gives His loving benediction. Here He mingles His prayers with ours, and unites His Spirit with our spirits, to lift us into heavenly experiences and blessing.

And when His people go forth He goes forth with them. Be it in special works for Him and His Church, or in our daily business, He is with us. A true Christian is a Christian in his ordinary work and plans of life, as well as in his worship and confession; and the Prince is with him in the one as in the other. Christ and His people are one, and can no more be separated in the common affairs of life than in their devotions. He dwells in them and walks in them.

He also goes with them into their trials and temptations, to direct, comfort, and sustain. There is no one upon whom we can so much count at

such times as upon Him. His sympathies are with the sorrowing; His help is with the weak and endangered; His consolations are with the faint and the sad.

And in our goings forth in active Christian duty, He hath specially said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." When His ministers stand up to preach His Gospel, He stands up with them, and speaks by them, and is their mouth and wisdom, as He is their salvation. When His people do for His Name and honor, and for the good of the Church and their fellow-men, it is more His doing than theirs. It is His Spirit acting in their acts.

And especially in our going forth out of this world, will our Prince go with us. In the passage through the dark valley, the gloom is often so deep, the mystery so great, the experience so untried, the natural dread so oppressive, that then, above all, we would like to have the assuring presence of some one able to sustain and comfort us. But there our Prince is especially near. He is never closer nor more precious to a believing soul than when it trembles on the confines of an unexplored eternity. Even amid the dissolution of the earthly house of this tabernacle, His hands are open to receive the outgoing spirit; and, in all the frowning gloom and darkness, His rod and His staff are pledged for our defence and consolation.

And yet one other thought from this text: *We have not long to worship here.* There is a gate

of entrance and a gate of exit, and the distance between them is short. It is the place for the adjustment of our affairs with God,—the place to get His favor and benediction,—the place of ready-making for a happy departure;—but it is no place for a long stay. The gate at which we come in already points on to the gate at which we are to go out. We cannot remain even if we would. The procession is ever moving, and we necessarily move with it. “For here we have no continuing city.”

Dear friends, have you entered these sacred gates and put yourselves in condition for a hopeful and happy exit from this world? Some of you have had your lot on the side of storms and darkness. You know what it is to be afflicted, bereaved, weighed down with trials and sorrows. Have they served to bring you in by that North gate? Some of you may have had but little else than sunshine and prosperity, to whom God has been very good, strewing your path with flowers. Has that served to awaken your devout gratitude and to bring you in through the South gate? Think what mighty interests hang suspended upon these questions. Let them not be put aside as impertinent. And if you have not yet sought to enter the blessed sanctuary, now is the time for you to act; that through these earthly gates you may enter the gates of pearl and find your home in the heavenly Jerusalem.

The Blessed River.

Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God.—Ps. 46 : 4.

WHEN the Roman Empire fell before the fierce invasions of the northern Barbarians the foundations of society seemed to be uprooted. Consternation and despair seized the civilized world. The stress of the situation moved Augustine, the great Bishop of Hippo, to write the greatest of his works, in which he sketched and defended a better commonwealth,—one which time could not waste nor enemies destroy. He named it *The City of God*, meaning that imperishable kingdom and state of which Jehovah is the Head and all true believers are the citizens. He traced its history, conflicts, trials, and triumphs, from the earliest ages, through successive dispensations, from Noah to Abraham, the prophets of Israel, the Advent of the Christ, the conquests of the Apostles on to the final consummation in eternal glory.

Such a City, or Commonwealth, there is, and always has been, and ever will be. The Psalmist exulted in the contemplation of it, and sung again

and again of "the City of God,"—"the City of the Lord of hosts,"—"the City of our God." And so the text speaks of "the City of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High."

This mystic City, or Commonwealth, has its centre in heaven. It is otherwise called "the kingdom of heaven." Many of its citizens are in heaven; but many are found scattered here and there all over the earth. They are not all of one order, one nation, or one continent, tribe, or tongue. Nor are they all included in one particular association, organization, or fold. Wherever there are men and women who acknowledge and adore the true and only God, and accept and follow Jesus Christ, His only Son, as their Lord and Saviour, there it exists in sacred sovereignty and gracious benediction. And whatever gravitates heavenward, and makes for man's eternal blessedness, belongs to this City of God, the new Jerusalem, of which God and the Lamb are the glory and the light.

And in connection with this City the Psalmist tells us of a *River*, by which it is refreshed and gladdened. It is a mystic River, as the City is a mystic City.

There is another river, very ancient and very great. It started with the tears of our first parents as they went weeping from Eden; and it has been flowing in ever-expanding volumes through all the ages since. Its waters were early dyed with the blood of Able. In Noah's time it had swollen to turbid violence which shook the earth and en-

gulfed the world of mankind in a flood of universal judgment. And since that time its streams of desolation have been crashing through the centuries destroying myriads and overwhelming the greatest empires in its course. It is the river of sin, and death, and judgment, flowing with tears, and sweat, and blood, turbulent with violence, foaming with wicked passions, and smoking with the burning wrath of Heaven. Language cannot tell the mischief it has wrought, the miseries it has created, the hells of woe it has entailed upon our race.

But the River of which the text speaks has a different record. It started in the foreknowledge and compassion of eternal Omnipotence before the earth was. It broke forth into the world when God said, The Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. It gilded Adam's tears with hope. It over-arched Noah's altar with the bow of promise when he alighted from the Ark. It followed Israel in their long pilgrimage through the wilderness. It made up "Siloah's brook that flowed fast by the oracle of God." The prophets stood on its banks and cried, "Ho, every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters." Jesus told of it when He lifted up His voice and said: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

Nor has this River ever ceased to flow in joyous and gladdening beauty, even in the darkest and the most calamitous times. Sometimes it trickled feebly among the rocks and rubbish with which depravity and falsehood obstructed its cur-

rent. Sometimes it seemed quite lost to human view. But it has never failed, and never can fail. Reinforcements of blessed rains and inspirations from heaven again and again have come to swell its volume and augment its flow. The ancient patriarchs and the seers of Zion saw and felt it in their days, and drank of it, and called upon their generations to "taste and see that the Lord is good." Since the world began it has been the joyous theme of Psalms, and rituals, and many holy visions. And to this day it still is singing its way among the peoples of the earth, bearing the treasures of heavenly grace and hope upon its bosom, giving life to all it touches, and destined to wash the curse clean out of our smitten and ailing world.

It is a *River*; hence an open and public stream, free and accessible to all;—a River, deep, abundant, vast, exhaustless, and at all times accessible. No winters can freeze it up. No hands can dip it dry. No obstructions can stop its onward course. No powers can fence it in. It is even the glorious Lord himself come down to be to us "a place of broad rivers."

And what rivers are to earthly cities this River is to the City of God.

All God's people have their life-drink from it. They could not be what they are without it. There are thirsts in man which cannot be satisfied nor assuaged except by the life-waters of this sacred River. Of whatever earthly streams or fountains men may drink, they thirst again and

languish if the deeper wants of the soul remain unsatisfied. But those who drink of this River of God have in them springs of joy and hope welling up into everlasting life.

It is also a purifying River. Humanity, as we find it, needs cleansing. There is a leprous plague in the world from which no one in the course of nature is, nor can be, free. But there has been a fountain opened for the washing away of sin and uncleanness, and its waters flow in this River. By these the citizens of the sacred Empire are washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God.

When Naaman washed in Jordan, as bidden by the prophet, his plague was stayed and his flesh came again as the flesh of a little child. And so there is perfect healing and purification in the waters of this River. From the heights of Jerusalem, on the Church's great inauguration day, there went forth a voice into all the earth to infected and perishing souls, saying, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." And everywhere, as many as comply with this word are purified in soul, and made "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," called to walk with the king in fine linen pure and white.

Beauty and joyous fertility also come of this River. What is more charming in nature than living streams, where the waters kiss the land, and the land flushes and blooms responsive to the

gentle touch, and the trees extend their arms to embrace the laughing current, and every rush and reed and springing plant stretches up to hang out some flag or tinted bell to the Lord of the waters and the sunshine! Even so does this sacred River gladden and adorn the City of God. Its citizens are like trees planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth fruit in their season. "They spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of ligualoes which the Lord hath planted, as cedar-trees beside the waters."

Rivers, moreover, are great arteries of commerce. By means of them cities secure much wealth and prosperity. They furnish outlets and facilities for profitable intercourse with distant countries. And such is this River to the City of God. By this its citizens have connection and commerce with other worlds. They do business with lands very far off, and thus secure for themselves pleasant and imperishable riches. What blessed imports from heaven come to them by means of this River! What medicines for the soul, what joys for the heart, what riches for the spirit are thus obtained! What treasures of wisdom, what wealth of mercies, what supports of character and dignities, what sublimities of hope, what titles to inalienable and eternal possessions do the citizens of this heavenly commonwealth acquire by means of this blessed River! Even under all the denuding calamities of a suffering Job they are richer than Croesus, or all the worldlings of the earth.

Nor is it difficult to find this River, or to avail ourselves of its blessedness. In God's Word and Sacraments,—in the doctrines and promises of His Gospel,—in the covenants of His grace,—in the ordinances of His house,—in the assemblies of His saints,—in the illuminations and inward promptings of His Holy Spirit,—its presence is manifest. These are the points of man's contact with it. In these may we drink of it, and take in all the riches of its cleansing, renewing, and sanctifying power. Coming to these, we come to the very well-springs of salvation and touch the "pure River of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

This, then, is the River, the streams whereof make glad the City of God. Blessed River! Happy City! Happy the soul that bows to drink of these waters! Happy the Naaman who consents to wash in their cleansing waves!

And may I ask then, dear friends, whether you have learned to appreciate and profit by what God has so mercifully arranged for our immortal good?

Some of you, no doubt, have long been enrolled as citizens of this sacred Commonwealth. You were born within its territory. From early infancy you have shared its benedictions. You have been marked with its badge and sealed with its signet. You were rocked in the cradle of its immunities, and composed to your infant slumbers by its songs. You have been reared under the sound of its bells, and led by loving hands into the halls of its oratories. You have been

taught to worship at its altars, and to rejoice in the music of its hymns. You have subscribed to the statutes of its government, and sworn by the name of its God. Have you then been faithful to your vows and loyal to your King?

Others, perhaps, have long been hearing of this heavenly City, but never pledged allegiance to its authorities. The River of free grace that runs through our sanctuaries has been running by their doors and into their very homes, and lodged many a drop of its waters upon their hearts; but they have not been softened to penitence, nor moved to seek the salvation it carries. Sometimes there may have come a spell of serious thinking, when they were almost persuaded, and perhaps made solemn promises; but other influences interfered, and their names have not yet found place upon the roll-books of the sacred community. Many are willing to go far and spend much, to drink of earthly springs, to bathe in earthly waters, to breathe the atmosphere of rocky heights and scented hills, for bodily invigoration, health, and pleasure; but when it comes to dealing with the City of God and the life-waters which alone can give health and salvation to the soul, there is often no heart for it, and many turn away in cold indifference.

I see people sick, and ailing, and sad, and full of soul-aches and discomforts. I see them trying varied expedients for relief and consolation. And I wonder, Have they tried the waters that make glad the City of God?

I see people who are growing old, feeble with years, bending toward the nearing grave. Most of the friends of their youth are gone. One after another of their cherished possessions has receded from them. The bubbles they once so eagerly pursued have vanished. They have run their race. Nothing more remains to them in this world but a coffin and a tomb. And I wonder, Have they accepted place in the Commonwealth of the redeemed? Have they partaken of the reviving waters that strengthen for ascensions beyond the reach of feebleness and death?

I see young men and maidens, full of the ardor, gayety, and hilarity of youth, eager in the pursuit of earthly pleasures, gains, and honors, and at whose hearts the subtle archer is aiming his arrow, presently to lay them with the dead. And I wonder, Are their names in the book of life?

I think what a lofty inspiration dwelt in the souls of those men of old who could walk forth amid the populations of the earth and proudly say, *I am a Roman citizen!* But how paltry was that short-lived honor compared with the immunity and glory of citizenship in the sacred Commonwealth of the saints,—in the eternal City of our God! Rome and its empire have fallen and passed away; but this City stands, and must stand forever, with all its sons and daughters destined to a blessed immortality. Come what changes and convulsions may, amid the worst desolations of death and hell these shall survive,

and chant their Halleluias by the crystal sea,
when this vain world shall be no more.

O that all who hear me this day may be duly
awake and alive to the sublimity of our privi-
leges, and find the inspiration and the peace that
come by this River, the streams whereof make
glad the City of God !

Brief life is here our portion :

Brief sorrow, short-lived care ;


That Life that knows no ending,

The tearless life is there.

The Perishing Spendthrift.

Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger.—LUKE 15 : 17.

HESE words call up the old, old story, so familiar to all,—the story of the prodigal son. But while that story is old, it is ever new, ever displaying some new beauty, some fresh light. Many a careless and disobedient heart is still being touched by it, and tears in the eyes of many an awakened sinner still testify to its melting power. It is a story which also makes its appeal to us, as to all wanderers from the Father's house who have been wasting His gifts and trying to satisfy immortal natures with this world's husks.

This was a case in which a young man grew tired of his father's house, and impatient under its restraints. He longed to have his own way, and to be free to indulge his own likes and vanities. Virtuous obedience became irksome to him, and he took what he could, turned his back upon his parents, and went away into a far country, to live according to his fancy. How accurately this

describes multitudes of highly favored people! Born and reared in the Church, and blessed with all the tender care of fond and faithful parents, they have suffered their love of home and duty to die out; and though living beneath the shadows of God's house, are now morally in a far-off country, prostituting a kind Father's gifts, and wasting their faculties and powers in reckless follies and degrading guilt.

But this young man's selfish and evil ways soon brought him into unexpected griefs. His first downward steps were easy and flattering. The ways of sin and self-pleasing seem strewn with flowers, and for a while may fill with laughter and delight. But the joy soon palls; the pleasure fades; and life becomes flat, and stale, and wretched at the last. Sin always humiliates and brings to want and distress. Like the relentless Shylock, it will have its pound of flesh, and reduces to utter helplessness when the need is greatest. Famine soon comes to the land of the profligate, and with it comes want with nothing to satisfy it.

This prodigal soon found himself destitute, forsaken, and starving. Instead of the comforts of home and the society of equals, he is with herds of swine, and worse fed than they. Sin is a denuding robber. It robs of good name, right feeling, and self-respect. A convict is known only by his *number*, and the sinner loses his name as a child of God and heir of heaven. He is in disgrace; his whole being is reduced to dishonor and wretchedness.

Homeless, friendless, penniless, and perishing with hunger, thoughts of home came into this young man's mind. The ill consequences of sin are apt to bring the past into impressive remembrance. A robber in his stronghold beside the Rhine was made to reflect on the days when as a little child he could not sleep without a kiss from his mother, and it melted him into repentance. Napoleon in his misfortune recalled with sighs the days of his youth when he went to his first communion. And many an one, under the weight of what his sins have brought upon him, has cried out in his remorse, "O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth!" And with all the enjoyment which can be gotten out of sin, it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder.

Perhaps the most bitter of all the memories of this wretched prodigal was that of his wicked ingratitude. He had given sorrow to his father and caused a grief to his mother that had perhaps brought her to her grave. And as iron in his soul were these reflections now. To think of happy homes made sorrowful and lives destroyed by our sin, and lips that might have spoken our forgiveness for ever silenced, is a terrible thing. Nor can repentance undo the trouble. It may secure us pardon through our Saviour's mediation, but it cannot extract the thorns of regret from the

soul. You may mourn over the grave of your parent, and be in bitterness for having broken that parent's heart; but that will not bring that parent back, nor do away the bitterness. The prodigal by genuine repentance may find pardon; but the guilty past he cannot blot out nor forget. One of the hardest punishments of sin is *remorse*,—the memory of misdeeds eating into the soul. And sooner or later, when cruel wrongs are done, the doer's heart will bleed with vain relents. So it has been with many we might name; and so it was with this prodigal in his destitution. His greatest misery was his remembrance of the happy home he had so recklessly abandoned, and the wretchedness he had so wickedly brought upon himself.

It was "when he came to himself" that these torturing remembrances seized him. This implies that he had been acting all the while like a man beside himself,—like one possessed, bewitched, or idiotic. And so it is with every one who lives only to gratify his selfishness and lusts. Whosoever chooses the ways of sin is a lunatic, a madman, one beside himself. Who in his right senses would give up a comfortable home to live so as to be made to envy the swine their food! When one in a moment of frenzy destroys his own life we account him insane: what then shall be said of him who knows the right, yet gives himself to the bad,—who throws away his life on sin,—who makes himself the murderer of his own soul?

But this prodigal's coming to himself was a

painful process. It disclosed to him a base and wicked past for which he could render no justification or excuse. It is said that a man feels no pain in drowning, but suffers agonies in being restored. So the wandering and sinful, captivated by their pleasures, feel no compunctions; but repentance brings a different state of things. Then bitter anguish invades the soul and the cry comes:

O pleasures past, what are ye now,
But thorns about my bleeding brow,—
Spectres that hover round my brain,
And aggravate and mock my pain!

The sinful and hardened heart must indeed be melted with sorrow for its ungrateful and unholy past before there can be sure amendment for the future. Peter's bitter tears had to flow before he could lift his eyes to the Saviour he had denied or read his pardon in that Saviour's smiles. And so it is in every case of true repentance. There is no salvation where there is no painful sorrow over the sins of a misspent past.

Many are so dimsighted as to think they have no ill past to lament. They have no idea that they have ever played the part of prodigal sons or daughters; but such have not yet quite come to themselves. Were their vision clear they would see enough to fill them with repentant grief. If you have never sinned against earthly parents, you have plentifully sinned against your good Father in heaven. Think how He has fed and clothed you all these years, and how safely He

has led you through the perilous wilderness of this world. Think of the health, peace, prosperity, friends, and comforts He has given you to enjoy. Think how He has kept His finger day and night upon your heart that it might not cease to beat,—how His good providence and guardian angels have ever been about your path, upheld you in your steps, watched about your bed, and given all the light and flowers that have cheered your life. And then consider the sort of returns you have made for all this. Has your gratitude and love been in any degree commensurate with the goodness bestowed? Has there been no forgetfulness,—no abuse of favors,—no neglect of God,—no disobedience to His laws,—no resistance of His gracious calls,—no trampling on His mercies,—no turning away from His Word, His House, and His Son? Alas, alas! Who among us has not abundant reason to strike his breast and cry, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!”

It was a good thing in this prodigal that he so far came to himself as to see the rags, the want, the misery to which sin had brought him. It was the starting-point toward a better life. Having learned that his relinquishment of the place and treatment of a son had made him a bondsman of a foreign master, and a starving wretch who would willingly have filled himself with the food of swine but could not command even that; he was now in a condition to take the right means for his salvation. And only as he thus came to loath his folly and his sin, and to condemn and

hate what had brought him down so low was there any hope of escape from his wretchedness. And so we all need to know and feel what an evil thing and bitter it is to depart from the living God, that we may get upon the road to deliverance and life.

When the prodigal came to himself he began to long for the bread of his father's house. Loathing the food and fruit of his waywardness, there was nothing now that he could relish but the bread of the house he had so wickedly left. It was a favorable symptom.

It is said of a young man of Brittany that he went out to fight for his country. The fatigues and hardships of war laid him low. He had come to the conviction that he must die. Nothing could rouse him from his deep despondency and distress. All the delicacies which kind hands brought to him remained untouched and untasted. He had no appetite for them. At length his father came to his bedside, drew forth a coarse loaf such as the young man used to eat at home, and said, "Take this, my son. Your mother made it for you." The young soldier opened his languid eyes, seized the loaf, and began to eat, saying, "How good is this bread from home!"—It was the commencement of his complete recovery. And it is ever a sign of returning health when souls grow sick of the world's wages and long for the spiritual food of the Father's house. The bread of home is the bread of life.

But this prodigal did not remain sitting, lament-

ing, and longing. He aroused himself to action. He said to himself, "I will arise, and go to my father." He did not know how that father would receive him. He knew only his ill desert, his wretchedness, and the starving condition to which his sins had reduced him. But his mind was made up what to do. He would throw himself on his father's mercy. Worthless, wicked, disobedient as he had been, he would cast himself in humble confession at his father's feet, hoping perchance for some favor, even if no more than to be made one of the hired servants.

And as he determined so he did; and it was his salvation. He built his hopes on a father's love. They were only dim and uncertain hopes, but he ventured upon them, confessing his sin and humbly pleading for some slight compassion. And this is just what is needed in the case of every wretched wanderer from God. There must be trust in the heavenly Father's love, and a practical rising up to test it by return. Unworthy, ragged, wicked, and starving as a soul may be, there is plenty of bread in the Father's house; but there must be a turning of back upon all sinful ways, and an humble suing for mercy. To sit still, and moan, and wait is to perish. There must be a prompt and decided rising up, a vigorous direction of the steps homeward, honest confession of sin, and humble pleading for forgiveness, ready to accept the humblest place in the Father's house. There is no other way,—no other hope.

And this ragged, sin-stained, and unworthy prodigal met with a thousandfold more favor than he for one moment dreamed. Nothing can extinguish the love that lies embedded in the parental bosom. The child may forget home and friends, but a parent can never forget the child. Wicked and wide wandering as it may have become, so long as its father or mother lives there is somewhere in the world a heart that beats kindly in its behalf and wishes it well. The story is not overdone which represents the old grandfather as unable to realize that little Nell was dead, but kept on to the end repeating, "She will come again to-morrow." And though this ungrateful son had done so ill and degraded himself so deeply, his father's earnest well-wishes for him had suffered no diminution. In his father's heart there was a constant outlook and hope that the erring prodigal would retrace his steps, and come back to the home he had so wickedly forsaken. And when the returning sinner was yet a great way off the father saw him, recognized him even in his emaciation and rags, and was moved with his tenderest compassion for his truant child. And so it is that the good Father in heaven pities His erring children on the earth, and looks, and longs, and waits for their return to Him, ready to embrace them with loving arms, to forgive their sins, and to welcome them to the highest favors within His gift.

When the returning prodigal was yet a great way off his father ran to meet him. And so the

heavenly Father comes to meet every returning penitent. Every sigh of sorrow over sin He hears. Every tear of penitential regret He sees. And to every movement of spirit to come back from sinful alienation He graciously responds. Nor is there a repenting sinner He does not meet halfway.

Dear soul, disappointed, wasted, and unhappy in your wandering from God, have you ever thought of the good and plenty in your Father's house? Have you ever compared your present condition to the good and happiness which there has place? Have you ever considered what a blessed boon it would be if you could enjoy even the humblest measure of what is there in unfailing plenty? Has there never arisen in your breast a desire to get back to that good home, and that good Father's love? What then has been the fruit of it? Has it moved you to do anything to better your sad estate? Hiring yourself to earthly masters cannot help. Home,—sweet home,—is the proper place for you. There there is enough and to spare, while you perish with hunger. A Father with undying love and kindness is there to receive and welcome you, if you but trust to His goodness and come. But you must arise and go to your Father.

Some are yet a great way off from God and righteousness, who perhaps have only just begun to think of forsaking sin, and going home to the Father. They may be weak, doubtful, and uncertain, but would like to leave their bad ways


and get back to God and peace. Let not such be disheartened. God's compassion for you has not been exhausted. His love for you has not died out. He is even now looking and waiting for your return. His eyes see what is going on in your heart. And He is ready to meet you half-way. Only have confidence to act with promptness and decision, and all will be well.

Indeed, we are all of us too far off from the good Father in heaven, and suffer much by reason of it. There is not one but has need to resolve, and arise, and hasten to get nearer by humble penitence and confession. Nor are we at all safe except as we get back to the favor of Him whom we have too much grieved and offended. But there is a home for us with Him as His children in the Father's House; and the word to every one is, Come home, my wandering child, come home.

The Way to the Father.

Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.—JNO. 14:6.

ESUS had just been speaking to His disciples about His departure out of this world, and His going to the Father. Whither He was about to go, and the way by which they were to come to the same place, they were supposed to know.

Christ had been showing and telling them all these things. But those who have the best opportunities are sometimes slow to take in and realize the truth. Thomas spoke up, and said, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" There had been no lack of plainness in what the Lord had said and taught; and yet the mind of Thomas was mystified about it, and could not see through it. Philip also put a question so stupid that Jesus exclaimed at his dulness. But for the clearing up of the matter, He answered Thomas' speech, and said: "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh to the Father, but by Me.*"

I. These words assume that the true goal of life is, to come to the Father, that is, to God. But what is it to come to God? It does not mean coming to His *being*; for no one can ever get away from that. Hence the Psalmist's exclamation: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." And wherever God is, He is in all the fullness and almightiness of His being; so that in these respects there can be no going from Him or coming to Him. Nay, we live, and move, and have our being in Him, and cannot absent ourselves from His presence and power.

To come to God means the coming to a right consciousness of Him, to a proper knowledge of His character and attributes, to a realization in our souls and convictions that He is, and that He is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek Him. It means the attainment of such a moral nearness to Him as to find in Him the supreme object of our interest and affection, the supreme joy of our hearts, the All in all of our thoughts, wishes, aims, and emotions. When our souls rest in God, in His glory, in His love, and in His will and purposes, we have come to the Father. And when all this is accomplished, it is heaven,—all that we can wish or enjoy of happiness and good.

Life has no higher goal. There is nothing superior for man, or any moral being. It is the sublimest portion to which it is possible for us to aspire.

II. But it is further assumed in these words that mankind in this sense have gotten far away from God. We are born in utter ignorance of Him, and at best are slow in coming to a proper knowledge of Him. Nature around us and within us ever prophesies of Him, and tells of His eternal power and Godhead; but the human soul is so full of darkness and corruption that it is exceedingly dull in comprehending the truth, and still more faulty in living up to what it does perceive. Man is a bundle of ever-craving desires, which never rest; and the true object of those cravings is God, whose offspring we are. But so perverted is our nature that these cravings go out after a thousand things which are not God, and which can by no means fill His place. God is the one only abiding good of the soul.

But until grace takes hold of us, and the Spirit regenerates, illumines, and renews us, there is no sort of moral nearness to Him. There is no love of God, no right reverence for His Name, no sympathy with His character or will, no seeking unto Him as our supreme good. Born with a corrupt and biased nature, the whole development of life, except as turned and modified by the operations of renewing grace, are adverse to the divine holiness, and one continuous rebellion against God's just and righteous government.

When Adam sinned a wide gulf came between him and God. And the more his posterity multiplied the wider this gulf became ; leaving to us in the course of nature nothing but a fearful looking for judgment and fiery indignation.

III. But it is further assumed and taught us in the text that arrangements have been made for the bridging of this gulf, and the opening of a way by which guilty and alien souls may come back to the Father of their spirits and live. Those arrangements were fore-announced from the beginning, and in due time were completed in Jesus, who here proclaims himself The Way to the Father.

This is a blessed announcement. It declares all impediments to our salvation covered and clean gone in Christ Jesus. In Him there has come a revelation of God's character, goodness, love, and gracious purposes to show us the Father, to do away with our fears, to attract our confidence, and to kindle penitential desire to return to His embraces. In Jesus there has been wrought an ample satisfaction for our sins, a payment of our debt, a covering for our unrighteousness, a release from our condemnation, and a free and full forgiveness for all our guilt and wrongdoing. In Him there is an effectual mediatorship between God and man, by which God is reconciled to His erring creature, and the way is open for us to enjoy His favor. In His righteousness there is justification for us, and from Him hath come a

Spirit of life and power to regenerate willing souls, to beget in us a new Godward aspiration, to overcome our love of sin, and to set us into action to be rid of it. In Him there has arisen a new Sun of Righteousness to drive away our darkness, to warm us into right affections, and to bring us under a new principle of gravitation. In Him we have a new Head and King to answer for us, to throw open our prison doors, to go before us as our Leader and Lord, to fight our battles for us, and to bring all who follow and trust in Him to the same eternal home of purity and peace with Himself in the Father's house. A glorious way to the Father has thus been provided.

In all this, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life,—the effectual and perfect bridge over the gulf of separation between God and sinful man,—the certain path by which condemned and lost souls may come to the same goal and blessedness to which He hath given promise to bring all who are planted upon Him as their hope.

Jesus is not only a sign-post to point out the way to heaven; but He is Himself the Way,—a mediator with living and almighty arms to grasp us into himself, to bear us on His shoulders and in His heart, to float us as a bark upon a full-flowing river, and thus to bring us to His home with God. All the means, the truth, the life involved in our complete salvation are personally centred and embodied in Him; so that we have only to plant ourselves upon Jesus, cling to Him, trust in Him, and give ourselves to Him in full

and confident surrender to His will and leadership, in order to pass out of condemnation to heavenly acceptance, from death to life, from aliens to fellow-citizenship with the saints, from children of wrath to sons of God. And Jesus thus proclaims himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that we may know whereon to plant our feet, and rest assured that in Him we have eternal redemption. This is most certainly true.

IV. But it is here still further declared that there is no other way of life for us. While Jesus proclaims himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life He is particular to add: "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." He is the *only* Way; and failing to take Him, we must needs stay and perish in our alienation and sin.

Many think to come to God and heaven by way of their own works, virtues, and goodness. But people can be moral, truthful, charitable, upright, and very exemplary and useful members of society without believing in Christ at all. There have been heathen men and people who quite reject the doctrine of Christ's atoning mediatorship, who yet have been models of good citizenship, commendable in life, and charitable in temper and deeds. Nor can we say that their excellent morality will be of no sort of consideration in God's final awards. But the pointed and positive words of Jesus must hold true, that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and that no man can come to the Father but by Him. People will be re-

warded according to their works, but they cannot be saved by them; for only "he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

Many think to be saved by trusting to other mediators. Some have mythic Saviours that exist only in fancy, to whom they commit their souls. Some trust in human priests to do for them and set all right with God. Some make mere ceremonies, rites, and sacrifices their dependence, as if ritual observances, fasts, abnegations, will-worship, and such like compensations for sin are to take them to heaven. Some pray to saints, or the Virgin Mary, or to angels, trusting to their merits and intercessions to save them. But to all this the word of Jesus is, "*No man cometh to the Father, but by Me.*"

And so there be some who hope for salvation through Christ, but give themselves no concern to be conformed to Him in life, temper, or righteous obedience. Good works of ours cannot save us; but we have no right to count ourselves saved, or on the way to salvation, while we live in sin and make no effort to model our hearts and doings to the holy example our Saviour has set us. "Faith without works is dead, being alone." A good tree bringeth forth good fruit; and if faith does not lead to righteous living and doing, it is not yet of sufficient power to put us on the Way to heaven. "Faith must obey the Father's will, as well as trust His grace."

Dear friends, there be many refuges of lies by

which sinners have sought to shelter themselves in hope of escaping the divine condemnation; but there is only one Way to the Father, and that is through Jesus Christ, embraced by faith, and devoutly served. If we ask what is the way to heaven, Jesus answers, "I am the Way." If we ask whether there is any other Way, He answers "None." If we ask whether there be not some exceptions in favor of good and virtuous people whom we may hope to meet in heaven, His answer is *No*.: "no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Timothy, who knew the Scriptures from a child, and Mary Magdalene possessed by seven devils, had but one way to salvation. The loving John who leaned upon the Saviour's breast, and the malefactor dying for his crimes, had but one way to Paradise; and that is the way of faith in Christ Jesus. All need expiation for their guilt. All need quickening and renewal of their hearts by His Spirit. All need a Saviour who can give life to the dead. All need a competent and availing intercessor to stand for them before the throne. And in Jesus only can such a Helper be found.

Most people have some idea of going to heaven when they die. They love to hear of that Father's house in which are many mansions. They often think of it, and talk of departed friends as there, and fondly cherish the hope of meeting them where all tears are dried and parting is no more. And it is well that their hearts are so far awake and alive to the heavenly blessedness. But something more is necessary. The question is, have

they betaken themselves to the only Way to heaven? Have they learned to know, confess, and trust in Jesus? Have they joined themselves to Him as their Lord and their salvation? O dear friends, be careful that you do not cheat your souls with hopes of coming to the Father-home without seeking and appropriating the one only Way to it.

Blessed Privilege.

Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

And He turned Him unto His disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see : for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see the things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.—LUKE 10 : 23, 24.



ANY people do not know when they are well off. Even the most favored do not half appreciate what they have. This is especially true with regard to spiritual privileges. The Apostles themselves needed to be told and admonished with regard to their favored estate in this respect. And even when their attention was called to it, they did not half understand the character and value of what the good providence of God had vouchsafed to them. When ills and privations come we keenly feel them ; but our blessings we take as a matter of course.

But not so would the Saviour have us feel and act. He would have us understand and appreciate His favors, especially those which relate to our spiritual and eternal welfare. This is amply shown in what the text brings to our attention.

What then are "*the things*" to which the

Saviour here refers as being seen and heard by His disciples; John, who was one of them, speaks joyfully of them. "The Word," says he, "was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." And again, "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked on, and our hands have handled of the Word of life, that declare we unto you." In other words, they had seen the Christ, the incarnate Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, and heard His words, and beheld His miracles. They were having familiar converse with the very Lord of glory.

To no people on earth had such privileges ever been previously awarded. Some very high favors had been vouchsafed to the patriarchs and prophets. God had made himself known to them by many notable revelations. They had many hopeful ideas of the Saviour to come. Abraham saw His day, and was glad. "The sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow," were foretold by the prophets in terms of happy exultation; but they did not fully understand what the Spirit that was in them did signify. It was through types and partially understood predictions that they had to do with Him. But it was different with the Apostles. They saw the Christ face to face. They were His companions. They were the hearers of His words, and the eye-witnesses of His mighty works. What they did not understand of His public addresses He ex-

plained to them in private. None of the mighty kings of old,—not even Moses, David, Elijah, or any of the prophets,—ever enjoyed such privileges. O the blessedness of those apostolic attendants upon the ministry of the Saviour of the world! We think back upon their lot, and would deem it an unspeakable happiness to have what they had.

And yet our privileges to-day are as high, and even higher than were theirs at the time the Saviour spoke these words. All that they had we virtually have. What they saw we also see through their eyes. What they heard we hear through their ears. All that they witnessed of the Saviour's life and doings we have through their testimony, and very much more than they then comprehended. How could they conceive the real majesty of Christ while they saw Him hungering, and thirsting, and without "a place where to lay His head?" Though full of glad anticipations from the greatness of His miracles and the wonderfulness of His teachings, they were utterly confounded when they beheld Him arrested, condemned, crucified, dead, and entombed. How defective and deluded their expectations until after His resurrection and the day of Pentecost! Until then, What did they know of atonement by His lifeblood,—of Redemption by His cross,—of justification through His death and resurrection,—of the Kingdom He came to establish? They had as yet no rightly apprehended Christmas,—no Good Friday,—no Easter,—no

Ascension Day,—no blessed Pentecost. But subsequently, to them, and thence down to us, have come all that they had at the time, and all the after demonstrations, teachings, and institutes which make up the fullness of the Gospel. No false notions are now in the way of a just estimate of the Christ and His Kingdom. We now have the whole plan of redemption plainly before us. We see Jesus, made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, but now crowned with glory and honor. We see all the types fulfilled in Him, the prophecies luminously accomplished, the power of His salvation reigning over millions of hearts, the all-sufficiency of His grace everywhere manifest in and around us, and His blessed Kingdom spreading throughout the world, tempering the spirit of nations, and taking up vast realms of humanity into the quickening and happy embrace of His love. And whatever congratulations were due to the first disciples when the Saviour spoke the text, they apply in a superior degree to us.

We may not think so. We may lament our doubts and uncertainties, and fancy how much better for us if we could be favored as those who accompanied the Saviour, seeing and hearing for ourselves what they saw and heard. But we vastly discount our privileges. The truth is, we see more, know more, understand more, with less hindrances to a genuine faith, than they at that time. If Capernaum was "exalted to heaven" by the presence and doings of Jesus among its

population, a heaven with a still clearer light and mightier appeal is that to which the favor of God has lifted the people of our day in these lands of churches, Bibles, and exhibits of His saving truth. Thomas believed because he *saw*; but Christ pronounces His blessing with greater emphasis upon those "that have *not seen*, and yet have believed."

People think of the honored kings and prophets of the olden time and envy their high privileges. But no ancient kings with all their glory nor prophets with all their inspiration were blessed in point of spiritual light and privilege as we are. Even the immediate attendants of our Lord as He lived and wrought on earth, high and glorious as were their opportunities, did not have it in their power to know Him as fully or to believe in Him as intelligently as may the people of our day. John the Baptist saw and testified of Christ and showed a wonderful insight into His work and mission. But with all his greatness and inspiration Jesus himself says, "He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Nor could we ever complain of any lack in spiritual light and privileges, if we only knew how well-off we are. The clear knowledge of salvation and the glory of God revealed in it is the highest boon that can come to man. And all this is now within the reach of all to whom the Gospel is preached. O that people did but see and feel what a precious thing it is to live in a Christian land, where we are encompassed with the story of salvation from

earliest infancy ;—where the Saviour's cross is never out of view ;—where His voice never ceases to call the sinwearied and the sorrowing to come unto Him and find rest for their souls ! How sad that we so little appreciate what prophets and kings desired to see, and did not see ; and to hear what we hear, and did not hear !

Would it be so if people had any right appreciation of the Gospel and these Gospel times ? Measured only by the cost of labor, blood, and treasure at which such blessed fortune has come to us in these "days of the Son of man," there never has been, in any time, among any people, a spiritual heritage so precious.

And when we look at the sublimities of personal exaltation and glory to which we are called, and for which the doors stand wide open to every one, no words can speak nor mind compute the excellency of the lot which so many only neglect and despise. Yes, blessed are the eyes which see the things which we see, and the ears which hear the things which we hear !

But whether we realize it or not, these gracious favors and opportunities impose corresponding responsibilities. So much given, much will also be required. The greatness of the mercies neglected augments the condemnation of their neglect. When the crash of judgment comes those highest in privileges unimproved will fall the hardest.

Dear friends, let us beware then how we treat our privileges. Their blessedness to us depends on our faithful attention to them. We need to

give earnest heed to them, lest at any time we should let them slip. And what would we be without the light, the assurances, and the promises of the Gospel! There is no forgiveness save through the atonement which it preaches; no hope in death but through the Saviour it presents; no blessed heaven save that to which it points and tells the way.

And yet further. Giving all diligence to make our own calling and election sure, we must not forget that gratitude demands of us to do also what we can to have others partake of the same blessedness. Rejoicing in the light, it is our mission to spread it. And in this duty we each and all have a share.

Dangerous Exposure.

Tenth Sunday after Trinity.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.—COL. 2: 8.



THE best and fairest things in this world are liable to be spoiled. The earth is a realm of ruins, and nothing good in it is safe. Man was made but a little lower than the angels, but his glory was soon tarnished. The holiest gifts are liable to be perverted. The richest flowers are often blasted in their bud. There is not a saint among men beyond the reach of danger. Even religion itself, pure as the Divine mind from which it comes, is liable to be despoiled in the hands and in the hearts of its possessors. Such at least are the implications of the text, and the foundation of its cautions.

Beautiful is true religion,—the simple taking of Jesus as our prophet, priest, and king. With the Bible in its hand, it stands by the cross, and looks up into the face of God with all the loving confidence of an accepted child. The voice of prayer, thanksgiving, and adoration is on its lips; but it does not rest in mere laudations. It is

honest, industrious, benevolent, and good; though it does not imagine that its works can justify before God; nor its moralities and charities exempt from worship and faith in Jesus. It is earnest and zealous; but it does not take mere emotion and ecstasy for Christian experience, nor regard a momentary zeal for God as an evidence of real piety. It has its creed, which it acknowledges and defends; but it does not regard orthodoxy as all that is demanded, or feel justified in bigotry, uncharitableness, or persecution, because "The form of sound words" is on its tongue. It loves to be in retirement with God; but it does not hunt for isolation from human society, as if that were the way to heaven, or seek its holiness in exclusion from the world in which God has placed it to labor and diffuse its healthfulness. It does not take saying prayers for piety; nor morality for religion; nor theology for faith; nor counting beads, penances, fasts, or monkery for righteousness; nor a sudden spring of an excited brain for forgiveness of sins. It sees everything in Christ. It sees God in Christ, and sees itself in Christ. It sees its righteousness in Christ, its justification in Christ, its exemplar in Christ, its hope in Christ. It sees the penalty of sin in the sacrifice of Christ; and realizes forgiveness in the promise of Christ; and finds its duty in the commands of Christ; and relies for help upon the grace of Christ. It weeps, but sorrows not as those who have no hope. It sometimes falls, but is not utterly cast down. It trembles, but it does not

despair. It is beset with oft misgivings, but it gives itself up in solemn covenant to God, and feels sure that He cannot disappoint those who trust in Him.

How beautiful! How true to our better instincts! In every feature it shows the light and excellence of the genius and benevolence of God.

But man, in his delirium, is oft unwilling to receive it or to accept it as it is. His sickly reason is prone to find in it deficiencies, mistakes, and defects. Even where it has taken up its residence in the mind, and begun to spread its radiance over the character, it is subject to damage and decay. It needs to be guarded on all sides, lest it be "*spoiled*."

And there be many spoilers of it. The Apostle names a number of them.

1. The first is *philosophy*, so-called.

Men of the supposed higher learning look askance at religion. They say, Yes, it is good; but some of its features need to be a little modified. It takes too humbling a view of humanity. It lays too much stress on the Bible, which is not what people think it. They are willing to admit that it is a book of much good history, a book of sublime poetry, a book of excellent moral precepts, a book which admirably describes human nature, a book from which all men may gather a great deal of practical wisdom and comforting promise. But it is somewhat superannuated, and many of its texts are spurious or faulty. The geologist has bored the earth, and found it

much older than Moses seems to say. The astronomer has measured off the universe, and thinks our world too insignificant to be the object of all that Divine concern of which the Bible speaks. The anatomist has examined the skulls of dead men, and compared the one with the other, and questions whether they have all proceeded from one pair. The natural historian has never found a race of snakes with powers of speech, and so he puts down the account of the serpent in Eden as a myth. The family of man speaks hundreds of languages, and men proclaim it a mere dream that there once was a time when "the whole earth was of one language and one speech." Miracles they say are so contrary to the general experience of mankind that they must be rejected or explained away; and what cannot be naturally accounted for they put down as falsehood or fiction. And this they call philosophy.

And, strangely enough, this diluted and emasculated theology is by many accepted and counted for the true wisdom. Some are content to reject everything distinctive in revealed religion, and count themselves believers, when they are mere rationalists, pantheists, deists;—proud, cold, phlegmatic, sneering Sadducees. They are spoiled by their philosophy. Follow them, and you let go all proper hold on Christ, and you throw up your interest in heaven. How do they know the length of time it took Almighty God to place the various strata which compose the crust of the earth, or that they rightly understand Moses?

How can they tell that this world is too small to engage Jehovah so deeply for its welfare? How do they know that that old serpent was a snake? How can they prove that the human race and language therewith do not extend back to one common stock? How dare they deny the credibility of miracles in the face of the many wonders which are spread around them every day and enacted every season in their sight? And what authority have they to contradict the testimony of God to our sinfulness, or to dispute the damning nature of wickedness? They think themselves wise, and they have not yet learned enough to learn that they are but babes and fools in these matters! They are but spoilers of the truth, against whom we need to be on our guard. "Blessed is the man that sitteth not in the seat of the scornful."

2. But the boasting philosopher is not the only spoiler of religion. The text speaks of *the vain deceiver*. This character comes in many shapes. He looks upon religion and says: "Yes, it is a grand thing. People can't do without it. It fits so admirably to their nature that they cannot altogether resist it. It addresses the deepest and mightiest feelings of their hearts, and they must feel it. He who comes wrapt in its sacred garb cannot fail to awaken reverence and command respect. I will therefore adopt it. But I will not merge myself into the vulgar mass of believers, nor remain in the obscurity of an ordinary saint. I will make myself a name and influence. I will be

a reformer. I will take advantage of the weakness of human nature and get me a following. I will avail myself of the power of religion, and in the name of God I will sway men and bring them to my standard." And so if he at first received the faith it soon became a mere means to an end, and often a very base end. A Mahomet rises and spreads the veil of dark superstition over millions for ages. A Hildebrand rises and does what is almost as bad. Romish popes and Jesuits and Protestant popes and Jesuits come forth to spoil, enslave, and destroy. One says lo, here is Christ, and another says lo, there is Christ. Sectarian champions, some with one hobby and some with another, go forth in the grand battle for personal notoriety, promotion, power, and gain. And in the many-sided conflict, excited and sustained by personal ambition, religion is degraded, distorted, crippled; Christ is crucified afresh; and the glad hopes of a free salvation are prostituted into a vile battle-cry that *Heaven is open to him who dies fighting for his leader!* It is awful to think of the traffic and speculation carried on by designing men and religious demagogues of both sexes in the hopes and fears of people more honest than themselves. Hence says Paul, "Beware lest any man spoil you through vain deceit." Serving a sect is not always serving God, and serving self is serving the devil.

3. Another spoiler mentioned by the Apostle is *tradition*. Traditions are the opinions, doctrines, or customs entailed from a father to a son, or from

one generation to another. Whatever is approved and handed down from age to age is *tradition*. But traditions are not always right and good. We have much by tradition ; but we may also err by tradition. Jesus tells of people who transgressed the commandment of God by their traditions, and taught for doctrines the commandments of men. Paul once persecuted the Church in his exceeding zeal for the traditions of his fathers. Peter speaks of some who were lost in vain conversation originating in tradition. By traditions the Jewish Church was brought to desolation. And to rest on tradition is to follow a blind guide and to give ourselves into the hands of the spoiler. Men have relied upon tradition, and it put the foot of the pope on their necks. They have followed tradition, and it gave them the priest instead of Christ, and Mary instead of the only Saviour of sinners, and masses and penances, and confessionals instead of that righteousness which alone can justify before God. Beware, therefore, says the holy apostle, lest any man spoil you by the traditions of men. Some of them may be good and true ; but we have "*a more sure word*" which came in old time, not by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. This is the only charter of our hopes ; the only anchor for our faith ; the only infallible guide for our lives. While tradition accords with this, we need not fear it ; but where it deviates, let God be true though it should make all the fathers liars. In some cases the fathers

may help us to a better understanding of the Scriptures. We should give their learning, their advantages, and their convictions the respect which belongs to them ; but they were but men, and erred like other men, and we must always appeal from them to the written word, which is able to make us wise unto salvation.

4. But we are also cautioned against "*the rudiments of the world*,"—the manners, superstitions, idolatries, and maxims which obtain among men of the world. It is a hard thing to keep clear of the influences around us. All men feel more or less that when in Rome they must do as Rome does. Even the most rigid and unyielding things are affected by external pressures. And we are liable thus to be affected in our religion as well as in anything else. The Jews had a pure religion, but heathenish elements were ever and anon mingling with it. Moloch would now and then lift up his bloody arms in the very presence of Jehovah's temple, and the priests of Baal oft supplanted the sons of Aaron. And when Christ came the Jewish religion was exceedingly corrupted with Gentileism and worldliness. The Christian religion started out on the pure basis of the ancient revelations. But it was liable to the same influences, and in all ages has suffered from the same causes. It was given to the world as a plain, simple system, unadorned except with its sublime spirituality. But when kings and emperors began to take it into favor they carried their worldly pomp with them into the Church. Mag-

nificent outward ceremonies were instituted. Gorgeous rituals were devised. Privileged orders were appointed. Mediatory offices were multiplied. Judgeships and authorities were set up. And at last what started as Christianity became but little more than baptized heathenism. In place of the old gods were patron saints. Venus became Mary. The elements of the world supplanted the Spirit of Christ. The true glory of the Church was gone; Anti-Christ had come into the temple of Christ.

And the same causes which thus spoiled the ancient Church much cripple and spoil Christianity now. Professing Christians sometimes become as worldly as worldlings themselves; and worldly tastes and ideas assert themselves even in religious things. The fashions and tastes and likes of an ungodly world are consulted in place of the word of Jesus. Something to draw,—something to attract,—something to entertain,—something different from the simple old ways—must be had; and the Spirit of Christ is killed out with new improvements and human inventions. Personal piety suffers from the same cause. Men of business must yield to the tricks of trade; people must keep up appearances, though it be at the expense of honesty; they immerse themselves beyond measure in earthly cares and then plead them as reason for exemption from spiritual duties; leanness comes over them and their religion is spoiled.

Brethren, it is no use to disguise the fact; this

world is no friend to grace and no helper to our salvation. If we would approve ourselves unto God, we must beware of it and watch ourselves perpetually. The Apostle thus cautions us to take heed. Religion was not designed to take us from our business, but to keep us at it for the glory of our Maker and the good of men. But no business is rightly conducted which does not proceed upon the principles of justice, fraternity, and benevolence. Religion was never designed to abridge our enjoyment of the good things of this life; but to regulate our desires and to keep our hearts set upon eternal good. Only let us take Christ, and adhere with confidence to His simple word and Gospel, and we will need no aid from philosophy, tradition, or the rudiments of the world, either to complete our own personal hopes or to commend our religion to others.

All that is "*not after Christ*" in sacred things is wood, and hay, and stubble, which can by no means stand the fires of judgment, and will be worse than lost to those who rely upon it. Philosophy may be good, and tradition may be good, and many elements of the world may be good; but Christ is better, and His word a better guide than all the pretended helps of earth. They that put their trust in Him shall not be put to confusion. Where philosophy fails He can help us. Where tradition is powerless He is mighty. And when the whole fashion of the world shall pass away He will be the everlasting Deliverer of them that are His.

Philosophy may spoil us, but it cannot sanctify us. Tradition may lead us into error, but it can give us no certain assurance of our acceptance with God. The world may enslave and ruin us, but it never can exalt us in the eye of God, or add to the joys of our immortality. But in Christ all things are ours. With our hearts firmly grounded in the stabilities of the simple truth as it is in Jesus, philosophy, tradition, the world, everything becomes subservient to our welfare and a minister to our joy: For all things shall work together for good to them that love God.

A Serious Problem.

Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

Wherefore do the wicked live?—JOB 21: 7.



WE need no argument to prove that the wicked do live. If any are holy and good, they are exceptions to the general mass of mankind. Not only do the wicked *live*, but they often flourish in all the thrift and luxury of life. There is scarcely one among us who cannot say with David: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green baytree." The pampered children of pride and folly are to be found on every side. "They become old, yea, are mighty in power. Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear; neither is the rod of God upon them."—*Why is this?*

It is not because they deserve it. The vineyard that produces only wild grapes is justly doomed to desolation. The figtree which continues barren under the tender culture of its owner is rightfully sentenced to be cut down. And how can those deserve to live who spend their being in

dishonoring and wronging Him who made them? God has given them breath to praise Him; but they employ it in folly, cursing, and blasphemy. He has given them powers to comprehend His glory; but they never adore Him. He has given them His Word; but they despise and disobey it. He has sent His Son to die for them; but they condemn Him, and spurn the offers of His Gospel. He is infinitely entitled to their devoutest homage and sincerest services; yet they never subordinate one hearty feeling, thought, or purpose to His holy will. He has nourished and brought them up as His children; yet they only rebel against Him. And if speedy justice were to be meted out to them for one sin of a thousand, they would all sink in a moment to everlasting death. It is not because they deserve it that they live.

Nor is it because God is not aware of their sins and guilt. "Mine eyes are upon all their ways," saith He; "neither is their iniquity hid." "There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."

People generally seek retirement, or choose the solitary place, or select the covert of the night to conceal and hide their crimes. They look carefully on every side to see that there be no witness of their unlawful deeds. But they forget that the all-seeing eye of God is on them all the while,—that those sins of secrecy and night had a voice that was heard in heaven,—and that what they thought no one should ever know is all written down upon the records of eternity. "I know

your transgressions," saith the Lord, "and your many sins." Verily "all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Not because their guiltiness is unknown then do the wicked live.

Nor is it because God is not able to punish them. He who hurled archangels from their sunny thrones cannot be wanting in resources to mete out justice to rebel men. He who balances the worlds in their orbits and wields the thunders of Omnipotence certainly can be at no loss for power to crush the puny despisers of His authority that crawl upon His footstool. He needs but to speak and it is done; to command and it stands fast. And not because He is impotent to punish do the wicked live.

Nor is it because God is satisfied with them or indifferent to their wickedness. The word is clear and plain on this point. "He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness." "He is angry with the wicked every day." "He hateth all workers of iniquity." And the symptoms and tokens of His anger are everywhere to be seen in the judgments which He sends.

Nor do the wicked live because God has never given sentence against them. It is written that "God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon the wicked and rain it upon them." Of every persistent sinner the record is, "Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he shall perish forever." The decree has gone forth that "the soul that

sinneth it shall die." And it is not because no sentence of condemnation is on the wicked that they live.

Nor is it that God does not mean to execute this sentence. "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent." Men change and shrink from the fulfillment of their words; but God is forever immutable. His covenant will He not break nor alter the thing that is gone out of His lips. "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever." "He hath sworn, saying, surely as I have thought so shall it come to pass, and as I have purposed so shall it stand." Heaven and earth may pass away, but no jot nor tittle of His word shall pass away till all be fulfilled.

Nor do the wicked live because God needs them. He indeed uses them. Such are his wonderful resources that "He maketh even the wrath of man to praise Him." In his mysterious providence the godless Assyrian became the rod of His anger and the staff of His indignation. The pride, tyranny, and blasphemy of Pharaoh are overruled to the showing forth of His power and the declaration of His glory in all the earth. Even the wrath and malice of those who crucified the Christ were made to open the gates of salvation to a ruined world. And so all the mischiefs of the wicked shall be turned in the end to work the greater glory of His Church and the sublimer happiness of His saints. But still He does not need them. He can carry on His great purposes with-

out Syria's ambition, or Pharaoh's pride, or Pharisæic malice, or any of those deeds of wickedness which He now permits. He can promote virtue without the aid of vice, and effect redemption without the aid of transgressors. The Divinity of Jesus could be established without having the devils declare it, and He can conquer the world to himself without the help of wars or the diplomacy of ungodly rulers. Not a single sinner, no matter what his estate or office, is in any way necessary to the Lord. He is God and can do whatsoever he pleases, without the agency of those who know Him not. It is not because they are needed that they live.

Wherefore, then, do the wicked live?

There is but one answer to the question, and one of great credit to the goodness and mercy of God. Retribution is delayed and sinners live that they may have a chance for salvation; for, as He lives, He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. "He is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Our God is good, and takes no delight in the ruin of creatures made in His own image. He would rather that all would turn from their evil ways and live. He has gone to great expense and pains to provide means for every one's salvation. He therefore delays the stroke of wrath, and waits and bears with offenders, and meanwhile so directs

His providence that they may come to a better mind, and lay hold of the forgiveness that is in Christ.

The Apostle Peter says that "*the long suffering of our Lord is salvation.*" There would be no chance for us without such forbearance. If God were at once to enter into judgment with us, it would be impossible for any one to be saved. If doom should follow instantaneously upon transgression, there could be no escape from devouring flames. What would have become of David, if justice had overtaken him in the midst of his criminal passion? What would have become of Manasseh, if God had called him to judgment when he was yet profaning the temple with his dissoluteness and making the streets of Jerusalem run down with blood? What would have gone with Peter, if God had made a sudden end of his probation while those false and cowardly words "I know not the man" were yet on his lips? What would have gone with Paul, yet breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples, if that vision of his on the plains of Damascus had been a call to the final tribunal of his injured God? And what, alas! would have become of us, if retribution had immediately followed transgression, and judgment succeeded right on the heels of our guilt? Who of us in that case would be here to-day, in this land of hope, with a throne of grace accessible, and the prospect of heaven glowing in our hearts? Not one; no, not one.

Every sinner therefore has his day of grace,—his respite from just and decreed punishment for his offences,—that he may have opportunity to repent and be saved. The children of pride and folly are not cut down at once, and the lewd and profane have their season of probation lengthened out, and the guilty revilers of Christ and religion are not visited with sudden judgment, that a new spirit may be wrought in them and perhaps bring them to a knowledge of the truth. David repented; and Manasseh repented; and Peter repented; and Saul of Tarsus repented; and many grievous offenders were, after a while, recovered from their sins to holiness; and sentence against the wicked is not executed speedily, in order to give room for them to hear the voice of God and make their escape to the refuge set before them. Year after year of trial is added, that, peradventure, they may see their folly and return to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. And to furnish every reasonable chance for such changes judgment lingers and sinners are permitted to live.

And, besides the mere matter of *time* for repentance, the long-suffering of God is often a *motive* to induce the very reformation for which it gives a chance. It is not always so. It is a sad and melancholy truth that, "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." There are those who make the very forbearance of God a license for unconstrained indulgence in sin. Because

they have leisure after their crimes they study to sophisticate the truth, and become vain in their imaginations, bold in their unbelief, and daring in the work of banishing all reference to God and retribution from their thoughts. Because their first sins involve them in no immediate embarrassment and suffering, they go on to mature them into fixed habits and make wickedness a part of their existence. Having commenced a course of lawlessness and rebellion against God from which they experience no present disadvantage, they feel emboldened to press it to still greater degrees. Many a man is wicked, prayerless, and Christless for no other reason than that God has been good to him, and has not proceeded to judge him at once for his sins.

But, while multitudes are thus emboldened in crime by the very leniency of God, it is different with others. There are those to whom God's forbearance and long-suffering become a powerful motive to bring them to repentance. Thus it was with Luther. The very mercy of God in sparing him when Alexis, his friend, was struck dead by his side, determined him from that day forward to devote himself to God.

Thus the wicked are permitted to survive their crimes that they may have the time and the motive to turn themselves and be saved.

From this, then, let us learn—not to envy the prosperity of the wicked. They stand on slippery places. They seem to be in peace, but the fires

of judgment and destruction are roaring under the very pavements on which they walk. There is everywhere a clamoring for their ruin. God's forbearance for a while holds the thunders back, that they may fly to Jesus and be safe. But except they repent, their desolation shall soon come, and they shall pass away as a dream when one awaketh. The curse of the Lord is in their house, and hell from beneath is moved to meet them at their coming.

Learn to appreciate the divine goodness and mercy. God never strikes till the last hope is gone. He bears with unholy people as long as it is possible for justice to forbear, and until all means are exhausted, only that they may repent and be saved. Oh, the depth of the mercy of God! It is high as heaven, deep as the sea, past finding out.

Learn, then, also, to make a right improvement of the divine long-suffering. Time, and means, and opportunity are given us to escape to the hills of salvation; and judgment delays that we may come to a better life. God means that we should profit by these mercies; and all the worse will it be for us if we now neglect the great salvation which He has so graciously put within our reach. And as we value our eternal peace, let no one trifle with these days of respite from deserved perdition, lest the harvest pass, and the summer end, and all hope be clean gone forever.

Gracious Thoughts.

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil.—JER. 29 : 11.



ONE of the most marked features of the religion of the Bible is the light in which it represents the Divine Being. Paganism represents Him as a stock or stone, carved into the similitude of a man, or a bird, or a four-footed beast, or a creeping thing, without intelligence, and even without life. Some, under the pretence of exalting His majesty and greatness, represent Him as occupied only in certain great creative and conserving acts, and not at all concerning himself with the little affairs of human life or destiny.

Men are prone to conclude either that there is no God, or that He knows nothing about our behavior in this world, or that He is wholly indifferent to what we do, or say, or think. But the holy Book assures us that He is an infinite and living Intelligence, who is with everything that He has made, not only as an unconcerned spectator, but as a loving Father, in sympathy with His creatures, consulting each one's good, and so

minute in His attentions as to keep count of the very hairs of our heads. So far from retiring from His works to dwell apart in the secrecy of His own unapproachable Godhead, uncaring for such worlds as ours or such beings as we, there is nothing done, nor said, nor thought, nor felt by man but He knows it, and notes it, and thinks of it, and orders His dealings with reference to it.

God does think of us. This He himself affirms in the text. The same is also attested in Nature, which is one vast volume of divine thoughts, in every one of which, if rightly read, we find marks and tokens that we have been thought of, and that our interests are not unconsidered. In the very framework of the heavens above us; in the adjustment of the sizes, spheres, and motions of the planets and stars; and in the arrangement of the relations of the celestial orbs to the world which we inhabit, references to us, as well as to other beings, can easily be traced. This mysterious ocean of air which envelops the earth, at the bottom of which we live, in all its currents, changes, adaptations, and never-ceasing operations,—the mighty sea of waters, in their varied distribution and multifarious offices,—the mountains and rocks, and lands and streams,—the trees, and fruits, and flowers,—the night and day, the rains and dews,—the seasons and laws of seed-time and harvest,—the beasts of the field and the birds of the air,—the links of kindred and the ties of home,—the relations of the elements, the course of things, and the constituents, pursuits, and very

burdens of life,—*all* are freighted with evidences in every part of the great machinery of creation that God has thought of us, and never ceases to have a very particular regard to us. “Many,” says the Psalmist, “many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to usward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee. They are more than can be numbered.”

And *God's thoughts to usward are all benevolent*,—“thoughts of peace and not of evil.”

This we do not always realize. There is so much disappointment, disaster, affliction, trial, and suffering that we are often doubtful and misgiving. We are in a constant war of good and evil, which surges first one way and then another. If we have peace one day, we are disturbed the next. There is not a rose but in plucking it we are pricked with its thorns. Hence we are often hurried into very mistaken estimates of the economy under which we are placed. Trouble comes or adversity overtakes us, and we conclude that God is thinking of us other thoughts than thoughts of peace. When Jacob finds Joseph gone and Benjamin about to be taken, he says, “All these things are against me.” But it is not so. Even these adversities are connected with “thoughts of peace and not of evil.” Joseph is taken just that he might be the instrument of saving Jacob and all his house, and that the promises might not fail. When Israel was pursued by Pharaoh, and the strong warriors of Egypt were pressing upon

their rear, while the mountains hemmed them in on either side, and the Red Sea was in their front, they felt as if God had led them there just to destroy them. But it was not so. It was to destroy their adversaries and to vouchsafe to them the sublimer salvation. When they were in the wilderness, without food or water, and ready to perish of hunger and thirst, they supposed in their anguish that God meant to do them evil,—that His thoughts toward them were bitter. But they were nevertheless “thoughts of peace,”—the preliminaries of marvellous miracles to save them at the last, and to fill them and all the after-church of God with joy. When David was being driven about in the mountains as a fugitive from the powers which thirsted for his blood he thought God had “forgotten to be gracious.” But it was a mistake, as he himself afterward acknowledged, and was glad that he had been afflicted.

The same mistake is frequently made by penitents. When the Spirit enters the heart, and makes it feel its guiltiness before God, and distresses it on account of its sins, and makes it fear the wrath it has deserved, it can hardly think otherwise than that the Almighty’s thoughts are thoughts of resentment and severity. But it is quite the contrary. The men of Nineveh, in sackcloth and ashes, were thinking that God was about to destroy them in the very hour that His thoughts toward them were peace. When the prodigal resolved to return to the parent he had wronged he was busy thinking how he should

placate that parent's wrath, and taxed all his disturbed and distressed wits to make out a speech of confession and self-abasement to modify the supposed anger of his father. But that father meanwhile was only thinking how he might welcome the returning sinner, and day by day was on the house-top looking for him and making ready in his heart for his joyous reception.

And so, O conscience-stricken one, terrified and alarmed at your sinfulness and neglect of your Maker: you wonder how He can be otherwise than angry with you. You doubt if there can be any mercy for you. But while you are thus wrestling with your guilt and the imagined wrath of God, His thoughts abound in mercy and pardoning love. You are thinking Him harsh, unwilling to forgive, and requiring to be pleaded with and bribed by sacrifices and good works; whereas He is full of joy at your willingness to accept His forgiveness, and cherishes toward you only "thoughts of peace."

So in Christian experience and life. You repent, and yet feel that your penitence is not worthy to be called repentance; that everything about it is so poor and superficial as to look more like mockery than reality. You love God, and often have great comfort in thinking of Him; but it is so faint and feeble, as compared with the warmth of affection and interest toward other objects, that you feel as if God could not accept such a cold and unworthy devotion. You are so dissatisfied with yourself, and ashamed, and full

of lamentation, that you think God cannot think of you with favor. But if you are really humble and sincere in your sense of your unworthiness, God knows your heart and sees your struggles of spirit, and might make it otherwise if He would. But He sees that it is better for you to be led through these depths and conflicts, to try you, and prove you, and develop in you the better fitness to appreciate and enjoy His mercies at the end.

So too in the performance of religious duty. One says, "I go into my closet; and kneel before God in secret; I try to pray to Him; but it seems only like a waste of time. My mind wanders to the ends of the earth; and I come forth feeling that it would have been better if I had not made the attempt." Another says, "I went to His house with sincere desire to worship with His people, and to commune with my Maker; but so many cares and trifles came into my thoughts that I cannot see how God can be otherwise than angry with me." But, my dear Christian friend, God knew what took you to your closet; and He knew what thoughts brought you up to His house, and what thoughts interfered with the perfection of your devotions, just as He knew the lamentations of David for not being permitted to build the temple which he had projected. But as David was not rejected because he could not do all that he desired, so neither are you because you cannot pray and worship as you would like. God said to David, "*Thou didst well that it was in thy*

heart." The poor widow, when she saw the rich people of the congregation putting their large sums of money into the treasury, doubtless felt very meanly of her mites, and lamented that she had no more to give. But the Saviour did not think her little offering mean. It was all she had; and because it was all she had, Jesus said it was more than all that those rich ones out of their abundance had given. No, no; we are not required to do *as we would like*, but simply *as we can*. And with all our deficiencies and disabilities, God's thoughts toward us are "thoughts of peace, and not of evil."

And so in other instances. The answers to our prayers are often so delayed that we think they are wholly unacceptable. The Cyro-Phœnician woman goes to the Saviour for her suffering daughter, and He does not seem to hear her. And when she finally gets a reply, it looks like a complete repulse. But, is she therefore to conclude that He is harsh, unfeeling, or angry, and unwilling to grant her request? What a misrepresentation this would have been of the real facts. Loving thoughts and overflowing beneficence underlay even that seeming repulse. It was only the better to prove her earnestness, to call forth more evidently her wondrous faith, that He might bless her the more and instruct His disciples the better.

Sometimes we are called to part with the chief joy of our hearts. The disciples were told that He whom they had taken to be their Redeemer was

to leave them. Were they therefore to conclude that they were to be left comfortless, with all their great hopes destroyed? So they might have reasoned, and so they were disposed to reason. But it was a great mistake. His thoughts toward them were "thoughts of peace, and not of evil." He was only going to send another Comforter, to prepare a place for them, to come again and take them to himself, that where He is they might be also.

In the ordinary course of nature it is appointed unto men once to die. We think how the light of this world is to fade from our vision, and our hearts cease to beat, and the warm blood chill and stagnate in our veins, and our bodies be lowered into the grave and buried out of sight. We see this occurring every day, and many friends being carried off. It cuts deep into the soul, and we imagine all sorts of sorrowful and hard things. We wonder what God can be thinking, and whither His redeeming love has gone, that He should leave even His own accepted children to such bereaving sorrows or so sad a doom. But it is not evil that He is thinking. He means it well. He would wean us from the things of earth to those of a better world. He would purge off our dross. He would discipline us for heaven, and draw us thither, that we might have the better destiny. In what seems the worst still His thoughts are beneficent,—"*thoughts of peace, and not of evil.*"

The fond parent is sore distressed to see the

dear child taken, and thinks it only evil and hard. Why could not this valued treasure have been left? Why should this afflictive vacancy have been created? And why should this great sorrow have been sent upon a circle so peaceful and happy? Dear friends, there was good in it, and only good.

In the Alpine regions, when the shepherd finds that the pastures for his flock are failing from the valleys below, he takes some lamb in his arms, and carries it up to the hills above, that the rest of the flock may follow and find plenty for their preservation and comfort. And so the great Shepherd in heaven. He comes and takes some precious lamb in His arms, and carries it up into the eternal hills, that the rest of the flock may be drawn thither for their everlasting good. His thoughts are "thoughts of peace, and not of evil."

Hotel Champeau

Sept 16th 1903

Hotel Champeau

Sept 14th 1904

Water Proclamation

Persistent Faith.

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity. July 22, 1902

Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.—JOB 13: 15.



T is the patriarch Job who here speaks. He was a great sufferer. He had been a rich man,—rich in sheep, camels, oxen, and asses, the sort of property which then made up rich men's estates. But all these had been wrested from him,—burnt up, or carried off beyond recovery. He had a great household of servants; but these were smitten with the sword, captured, or otherwise destroyed, until scarcely one was left. He had seven sons and three daughters, all settled and happily situated in life, full of comfort in each other, and the particular pride of their father. But, in the midst of life and its festive enjoyments, a great storm struck the house in which they were assembled, overthrew it, and killed every child he had.

Nor was this all. Troubles never come singly. Wave upon wave had dashed over him, but other and mightier ones came. He was himself stricken with sore sickness. An elephantine leprosy seized him, and covered him with swellings and ulcerations, making him a loathing to himself. His

friends could no longer recognize him amid the distortions of his features, and were so horrified at the spectacle he presented when they saw him, that they lifted up their voices and wept, rent their mantles, and sprinkled themselves with dust. And still more to intensify his sufferings his wife turned adversary and tempter, and urged him to curse God and die, rather than live on in such wretchedness.

And to all this came the harsh and persistent accusations of his mistaken friends, who referred his distresses to some flagrant guilt, which they charged him with hiding in his heart. He knew and protested that he was not a hypocrite, and yet he was at a loss to understand his case.

It is a hard thing to be tormented without being able to know why. And with all the rest of Job's miseries, this inability to unravel the mystery was no small part of his distress. One of the intensest of his cries was for God to show him wherefore He thus contended with him.

But amid all these intensified sufferings Job still spoke of having an adequate Helper in whom to trust. His faith was greater than his trouble. And even if his sufferings should be intensified, doubled, and protracted till life could no longer hold out under them, he would still hopefully confide in God.

Satan alleged that Job would give up his religion if his riches and prosperity were taken from him; and so the accuser was allowed to afflict him. But the result demonstrated that his devo-

tion had a deeper foundation than a mere selfishness which looked only to the enjoyments of a prosperous earthly life. Job was a true believer, and showed that if deprived even of life itself he had faith in the Almighty, and that to Him He would cling.

Nor was this a mere foolish fanaticism. There *is* an Almighty One, who ever lives, and we in Him. He is the Lord of all realms and of all things. No hair can drop nor sparrow fall without Him. Our hearts beat because He sustains them. Life and death, prosperity and adversity are alike from Him; nor can anything be or come to pass without Him. Nor is He less the friend, protector, and saviour of His believing people amid the worst seeming adversities than in the brightest of earthly comforts. However hot the furnaces through which He leads them, or extreme the demands He makes of them, they shall not be the losers in the end. Nay, to lose life for His sake is the sublimest saving of it.

Such unfaltering faith in the divine goodness amid earthly suffering is not as common, even among Christians, as it ought to be. People believe in God; and while things are prosperous they think Him good, and readily trust and hope in Him. But when long and multiplied adversities come, and the soreness of trial and hardship is felt, and their days and nights are filled with grief and sorrow, they are apt to be fretted, sometimes even to desperation. Though they have more comforts left than Job had, they are prone

to feel and act as if there were no God, or as if He were dead, or had lost His power and graciousness. And many are so shaken by their trials that they fall out with God, and will not believe that He cares for them, or that there is any good in trusting in Him.

But God is merciful even to such, and it is not right for us to blame them too harshly. Human nature is weak. Faith has some hard battles to fight. And things often come to such a pass that we are greatly at a loss to know what to make of them. God's footsteps are in the sea. Many are the occasions on which He seems to hide himself. Expectations are disappointed or reversed; earnest prayers are not answered; our thinking is baffled and confounded; matters take on a contrariness that seems to throw everything out of gear; and we wonder what possible good is in it. It is easy enough to be pious when all runs smoothly. But when clouds and tempests come, and darkness takes the place of light, and the dealings of God give us pain, and the sword at every step is made to pierce our bosom, and everything in the world seems turned against us, then to be confident in the Lord demands an amount of grace and faith not so easy of attainment.

And yet such a victorious confidence is possible. It was shown in Job, and should be aimed at by us. His adversities were intense and many; but they could not dislodge nor even shake his steadfast trust in God. His wealth gone; his children gone; his health gone; his wife turned against

him; his best friends condemning him as a wicked dissembler; and with seemingly nothing left to him but a miserable death and a clouded fame, he successfully held on to his faith in the love and justice of God, and cried his victory over every doubt. From the lowest depths of his sufferings came the word of triumph, "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.*"

Job did not come to this rare and high attainment all at once. He was a man of like passions with us, and had to be taken through many sharp contentions and anxious exercises of soul to become such an exemplary believer. Nor was it without many a faulty word and passion that he came to the full victory of faith. At first he thought himself better than he was. It required the severity of his trials to reveal to him his defects, and to bring him to patient waiting upon God. But he was loyal in the centre of his being, even when speaking unadvisedly with his lips; and this it was that finally brought him through as a grand example of confiding patience under the worst adversities.

Faith and trust in God cannot unmake grief and sorrow, nor render suffering and death attractive and beautiful. Even the spotless Son of God had His pains and distresses of both soul and body; and His followers cannot hope for exemption. The thorns will pierce and sore trials will come. Flesh and blood will be made to smart. But where the soul is stayed on God, faith has wonderful power to buoy up the spirits, to reconcile

us to our lot, and to steady the soul. It looks through the clouds. It is not vanquished by the darkness it cannot penetrate. It furnishes an anchor of hope both sure and steadfast, which links the believer to the continent of eternal glory.

And a grand example for our encouragement and imitation is here. To fret and vex ourselves because things go badly with us is not the way to master troubles, nor to help us when they come. We may not be able to see through them, but God does, and stands pledged to make all things work together for good to them that love Him. The great matter is to hold on, hold in, and hold out, as Job did, sure that the end will abundantly justify all the ways of God and restore unto us double of all that we have suffered. Lazarus was not the loser by reason of his poverty and sores; and Job became all the more renowned and glorious because no sufferings could dislodge him from his trust in the Almighty. Therefore, faint soul, *hold on; hold in; hold out.*

September 28th 1884 at New York, N.Y.

A Great Cure.

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.

And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.—2 KINGS 5: 14.



VERY distinguished personage, as the world counts greatness, here comes before us. He was the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army,—“a great man with his master, and honorable.” He was rich, he was high in office, and he was held in eminent esteem. Next to the king himself, there was perhaps no man in the realm of whom so much account was taken, or on whom so much confidence reposed.

But, with all his dignity and honor, there was one great drawback to his estate, comfort, and hopes; and one which tended to vitiate everything else. The record says *he was a leper*. He had become the victim of a loathsome and incurable disease, regarded with intense abhorrence wherever it is found. A leper was usually held to be as good as dead. And with this disease this great Syrian general was attacked, sealing to him a life of suffering and humiliation, and a wretched death, if not in some way cured, as few have ever been.

But how was he to be cured? The trouble was constitutional, and had become so much a part of himself that no skill of physicians or power of earthly remedies could reach it, or separate between him and the detested affection. From all that he or his friends knew, and according to the common experience of ages, his case was hopeless.

And yet there was cure for him. It was not in Syria. It was not to be found anywhere in heathendom. But it existed. In all periods of the Church, God has lodged with His people certain "gifts of healing." Among these powers was also that of curing the leprosy. Christ exercised this power in various instances during His earthly ministry; and the same was done by sundry of the prophets who preceded Him. There was also a prophet, contemporary with this great Syrian, who stood in such relations to God that he had it in his power to work miracles, and thus to cure leprosy. He was a man of note in his own country, but quite unknown to Naaman, until his attention was drawn to him by what some might call a mere accident; but what men call accidents are all matters of divine providence.

It was but a short time before that the Syrians had made war upon Israel, and carried off many prisoners, great and small, whom they had sold into slavery. Among these was a little Hebrew girl, who had been purchased by this Syrian general as a waiting-maid for his wife. Having become interested in the family, and acquainted

with Naaman's trouble, she one day happened to say to her mistress that she wished her lord could be with the prophet that was in Samaria, as he would recover him from his leprosy. Unconsciously to herself, she thus became a preacher of salvation to that home. Her words were reported to her lord, and thence to the king, and a state expedition was instituted to go over into Palestine to secure the aid of the prophet in relieving Naaman of his disease.

It is a blessed thing when children are early taught in matters of religion, so that they may anywhere and always be prepared to give information and light upon the facts and truths relating to grace and salvation. In this instance a little servant girl thus became a veritable prophetess to the great house of Syria's greatest general. Nor does it require much genius, eloquence, or scholarship to be an effectual bearer of the tidings of divine grace. What is most needed is simply a clear knowledge and confident persuasion of the facts, and a good, benevolent, and sympathetic heart to tell them. Damascus doubtless had men of eminent attainments, genius, eloquence, and wisdom; but they and their great abilities were mere ciphers and puerilities by the side of the few simple words of this little female slave, so far as regarded the helping of her lord to get rid of his leprosy. In her humble station and feminine childhood she was worth more than a thousand scientists and facile orators in such a case, because she knew where the healing power could

be found, though she only talked it in her juvenile innocence.

But in proposing to avail himself of what his little maid had told, Naaman made some serious mistakes, such as need to be avoided if we would profit by divine grace. His great consequence was much in his way and disabled his efforts at every step until he was brought to give up all his assumed loftiness. Had he taken the suggestions as given by the little prophetess all would have been right; but he was too great a man to be content with such straightforward simplicity. He must have things arranged to suit his style and state. He was told, Go to the prophet in Samaria; but what had a great man like him to do with one so low in rank and obscure in position? Naaman was the man to do with kings and the highest authorities. He would apply to his sovereign and get royal letters wherewith to come to the king of Israel. Nor would he go empty-handed. He would go in state and loaded with treasures of state. Gold and silver, to the amount of fifty thousand dollars, besides ten changes of costly raiment, he took with him as a grand *back-sheesh*. And thus in style, as a royal ambassador, he made his way to the king of Israel, thinking that this was what became his dignity and high estate.

But the grace of God was not at the command nor within the reach of such a spirit. People who thus exalt themselves are bound to be humbled. His royal letters did not avail. When the

King of Israel read them he was astounded and indignant. He rent his clothes, denounced the proceeding as a conspiracy to bring about war, and exclaimed, Am I God, that I should recover a man from his leprosy! So the grand presentation proved a total failure, all because Naaman took his own self-consequential way for it, instead of following the suggestion of the little maid to go to the prophet in Samaria.

But even when it was made evident that he must go to the prophet, the same spirit which prevented his success in the first instance again proved a vexatious hindrance. Disappointed and humiliated that he could not get the prophet's services through royal command, and obliged to go to the humble man whom he thought to make come to him, it was in no very amiable mood that he directed his cortegé to the house of Elisha.

When he reached the prophet's dwelling he did not condescend to dismount. His dignity and self-importance would not allow him to do that. He merely sent word in to Elisha to come out to him, expecting that he would recognize and honor the great Naaman, and go through a round of ceremonial pow-wow-ing with due regard to the importance of his patient. But Elisha did not know his lordship, or rather knew him too well to pamper his pride or to think of the giving of divine grace where such a temper held sway. He would not so much as make his appearance. He simply sent a servant to tell the great man to go wash himself seven times in the river Jordan and

his leprosy would be cleansed. Naaman took this as an insult to his dignity and his government, and drove off in a great rage, resentfully berating the prophet for his disrespect and lack of good manners. But it was of no use ; he had to pocket the insult, as he regarded it, and come down to do according to the prophet's word or keep his leprosy.

And here again the proud Syrian was made the pupil of a servant. A little servant girl told him where to go ; a servant of Elisha told him what to do ; and now a servant of his own became his exhorter and teacher, to expostulate with him in regard to his unreasonable passion and bring him to his right mind. The whole thing was simple and easy enough from the beginning. It needed neither kings, nor gold, nor costly apparel, nor ceremonial manipulation. It would have been enough to go in humble quiet to the prophet, to entreat his help and to do as directed. As it was, the prophet had not bidden him to do any great thing. It was no harsh or painful matter to go wash in Jordan. The river was near at hand. Pharpar and Abana, rivers of Damascus, were indeed much more beautiful and attractive than all the waters of Israel ; but that was not the question. He needed to go where the cure was to be found, and not simply to the waters most pleasing to the eye. Effective remedies seldom are palatable. When people want favors it will not do to pique themselves on their taste. The prophet's word, not Naaman's pride, was to govern in this

case. But the prophet's word did not please his excellency. Some great thing he would have done willingly ; but when it was said, Go wash in Jordan, his dignity was offended and his importance was insulted.

God is no respecter of persons, and in matters of grace and salvation the high must come down to the same plain with the low. There are no favors nor immunities for princes and patricians above those of plebeians and servants. And if people will not take divine help and cure as God proposes to impart it, they may gratify their self-consequence, conceit, and passion, but they cannot have his healing and saving favors.

The reason why the man was so crossed in his ideas and preferences is plain enough. He needed to learn that in these matters of grace he must obey, and not command. God does not give that which is holy to dogs, nor cast his pearls before swine. The treasures of His grace are too precious to be bestowed indiscriminately where there is no proper appreciation of them,—no humbling of ourselves to receive them. People must be willing to come down to God's terms, or they are not worthy of His favors, and cannot have them. They must learn to submit their will to His, and do as He directs, or they must remain in their sins.

The expostulations and sound reasonings of Naaman's servant succeeded in subduing his proud petulance, and in inducing him to make honest trial of the prophet's directions. Repent-

ing of his impatient rage, he went down to the Jordan and washed as he was told.

Even the seven times in which he was to wash had an important spiritual bearing. So far as the washing was concerned, once would have done, or it might have been dispensed with altogether; but then there would have been no test of the man's faith, and no such proof of his humble and persistent obedience. The washing was necessary, and the seven times were necessary, that his dutifulness might be adequately shown. There was doubt whether he had faith and self-humiliation enough to wash at all, as the prophet bade him; and that doubt had to be removed by actual compliance. Having washed once, there was still a doubt whether he was sufficiently made up to persevere in the duty prescribed. As no signs of cure appeared in the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth washing, it was a question whether he would not become disgusted with the performance, and give up in unbelief of any favorable result. He therefore needed to be tried to the full extent of the seven times. Being faithful and obedient to the seventh washing, it was evident that the spirit of faithful obedience was in him, that he had really mastered his pride, and that he had become a willing subject of the divine word. So then the desired cure was reached, and "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

And what blessed instruction there is in all this for us! We are all spiritual lepers. We belong

to an infected race. There is upon us a filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. The taint is upon us from our parentage. It is in our blood and pervades our whole being. In some it is more alarmingly developed than in others; but it is in all of us, and we must needs die of it, if it be not counteracted and overcome by divine power and grace. Happily there is a prophet in Israel who can recover us from our leprosy. The servant-maid, the Church, has made us acquainted with His saving power. For years and years she has been saying to us, "Would God ye were with the Prophet! for He would recover you from your leprosy." What the treasures of empires cannot purchase is at hand. There is not a man or woman living that needs to perish. The fountain flows for the washing away of sin and uncleanness. No great thing is required to be done. All that any sin-stricken soul needs is humbly to accept and obey the prophetic word,—to give up all idea of merit or good deserving, and try for deliverance in the way prescribed.

The word to Naaman was, "Wash and be clean;" he washed, and he was clean. And when it is said to us, Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, that your sins may be blotted out; why should we stagger at the simplicity and easiness of the requirement? Ready to do some great thing, should we not the rather be obedient when it is said to us, Wash and be clean? Alas, that when the Jordan is at hand with its cleansing flood, people

will be thinking of their own Abana or Pharpar, where no healing is! that some who feel and know that the deadly ailment of sin is upon them, are yet willing to run the awful risk of never being cleansed at all, if they cannot have it in the way of their own choosing! To all such the case of the Syrian leper speaks with impressive power. To all such the pointed expostulation of his servant applies with unspeakable point: "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then when he saith to thee Wash and be clean?"

You may say that ceremonies and outward formalities are nothing; but would Naaman have been healed if he had not gone down and washed himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the Man of God? Then how can we hope to be cleansed of our more fearful malady without humble and obedient submission to God's appointed ordinances? Hath not the Saviour said, Except ye humble yourselves, and become as little children,—submissive, meek and obedient,—ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven?

Futility of a Divided Service.

Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.

No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.—MATT. 6: 24.



MAMMON means *riches*, — not simply money, lands, and stocks; but whatever is sought and treasured as good fortune in the things of this world. Everything or anything that is an object of desire, pursuit, and trust to people of worldly mind and selfish ambition, is Mammon. It includes wealth, power, honor, fame, business, pleasures, gayeties, amusements, and whatever of earthly good or enjoyment people set their hearts on, or exalt into the room of God, whether it be riches, station, place, or anything else.

As to the other Master spoken of, most people feel and agree that God ought to be honored and served. Even atheists and unbelievers readily concede that, if there be a God, no devotion is too much for us to render Him, and no pious obedience can go beyond what is His righteous due. Any child of sin and Satan, in his serious and sober moments, will agree that it is right

to serve God, and fault himself that he has not been more dutiful in this respect. The common conviction is clear enough that as truly as God is God, in whom we live and move and have our being, we should honor and serve Him; and few fail to do some things in the line of what all feel to be the righteous and indefeasible obligation of every one.

But while this is true, the human heart is prone to give chief attention and energy to another Master. To the natural man, Mammon has wonderful charms and commands many ardent worshippers. And there is much that makes it seem reasonable. In a world like this there is strong call to be concerned about what tends to make life easy and pleasant. We must live. We must have food and shelter, and provisions for those dependent upon us. Many desirable things present themselves, and invite our efforts to secure them. Riches, honors and place, promise to add so much to the convenience, comfort, zest, and joy of life, that it seems like a wrong against ourselves to be indifferent to them. Thus multitudes are drawn and captivated, and feel that some concession must be made to Mammon. They are not oblivious to the fact that there is a higher good than the most favored estate on earth. They fully consent that an outward life of ease, comfort, distinction, or wealth is not the chief thing for the soul. They do not for a moment dispute that all earthly good is evanescent, and must presently fail those who have it,—that nothing

is more uncertain, perishable, and unsatisfying than what worldlings most value and strive for. They know every earthly possession is liable to failure at any time, and at best will have to be given up after a few years. They know full well that every dollar one wins here he must presently lay down and leave forever. Mammon is perishable, and cannot help when the ultimate test comes. Yet multitudes are infatuated; and Mammon, after all, gets marvellous credit; while many who would fain count themselves the children of God, are deep in the service of this captivating idol.

Hence that remarkable manifestation of life and character to which the Saviour here refers; that is, the attempt to reconcile the service of God with the worship of Mammon,—the endeavor to gain this world without losing the blessedness of the next. They cannot honestly renounce the claims of God and the soul, and yet feel that they cannot be fair to themselves without trying to win and enjoy as much of this world as possible. They readily admit that it is right, necessary, and good to serve God, and that to live only for the indulgence of their carnal aims and desire is very unworthy and wrong; but they cannot give up the world. And so they hover between the two, and think to meet the case by conceding something to both, and pursuing a fancied mean between them by which to quiet their consciences, and yet gratify their worldly desires and covetous fancies. Many are the instances of this.

That some should wish for such a compromise, and try to have it realized, is easily understood. Arouse a man's religious feelings and convictions which are not yet strong enough to control his heart and life, and you have all that is necessary to start him on the attempt which I have described. Like Herod, he will do many things in the line of religion and goodness, while yet there is no full surrender of his soul to God and righteousness. But how any one can think to make a success of it, and come out safe in the end, is a puzzle. It is as plain as that two and two make four that two things so essentially discordant as a life of genuine piety and a life of worldly conformity cannot possibly be harmonized. And here stand the words of the Saviour: "*Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*"

It is sometimes wise and proper to be neutral. There may be feuds, dissensions, and controversies in which it is well to refrain from taking sides. But it cannot be so in the matter between the service of God and the service of Mammon. The one is so radically at variance with the other that there is no middle ground, and no possibility of standing with both. We must be on the one side or the other. Not to take a positive stand for God and heaven throws us where there is no other standing-room but with those who have Mammon for their god. It matters not for good words, pious intentions, and half-way doings; if the heart be not made up, fixed, and settled to know no lord but God,—no rule or aim of life but

the doing of His will, our place is with the Mammonites.

It is not meant indeed that we are to tear ourselves away from the ordinary associations, attachments, and pursuits of life; or that we dare not eat, and drink, and clothe ourselves becomingly. It does not mean that we are never to laugh nor allow ourselves the enjoyment of whatever good of this world our merciful Father in heaven may award us. He has made us human beings, and put us here with certain needs, adaptations, capacities, instincts, and relationships; and He means that we should be true men and women, and live and handle ourselves as such. We are not required to abjure all attention to the things of time. That would be to fault and contradict, not to serve Him. But we are to order ourselves in these earthly spheres, necessities, and surroundings, so as not to forget God, not to pervert His gifts, but so to direct and use our powers that we may fulfill the purposes of our creation and do honor to His Name. We may value wealth, and labor for it, and enjoy it; but must remember that it is the Lord's, and that we are responsible to Him for the use we make of it. We may share the pleasures of society and a cheerful life; but must hold them subservient to the higher aims and purposes of our being. We may have respect to honor, influence, gain, and fame, and have them before us in our efforts; but not so as to make them the sole spring of our industry and activities, or to treat them as the true goal and end of

our existence. We may be alive to the attractions of the world God has given us and respond to them; but not so as to waste ourselves upon them.

But the danger is not that we will have too little regard for the gains, possessions, pleasures, and honors of this world. There is a perverted nature in all of us, and it is sure to show itself unduly absorbed with what is only earthly and temporal to the neglect of the heavenly and eternal. Few people live over whom Mammon does not have an immense influence, even where the will is for something better. We all have need to struggle against its seductive power,—against the temptation to bestow undue affection upon earthly good, and to grieve and pine when we have it not in the measure we would like. It is a trying thing to human nature to be poor; yet it is better to live in want and die of starvation, peacefully submitting ourselves to the divine will, than to revel in the riches of Dives and fare as he did when death comes. The great matter is to be dutifully and confidently enlisted under the standard of the King of kings and Lord of lords, seeking first, and above all, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

It is no hardship that the blessed Saviour would thus lay upon us, but rather to furnish us a sublime and peaceful deliverance. From an absorbing and bootless love of the world which never can satisfy,—from torturing and consuming anxieties about what we shall eat, drink, and put on,—

from all vexatious cares that have no higher aims and ends than earthly fortune,—from slavery to greed, and self, and appetite, and perishable pleasure and gains in this world,—He would have us happily detached and delivered by a dutiful trust in Him who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies. There is something sweeter than selfish lust,—sweeter than this world's gains,—sweeter and more precious than all the treasures of Egypt. It is the sweetness of freedom from carking cares and anxieties about what must perish in the using,—the sweetness of having all things in God who careth for us, and rest in Him who knoweth what we have need of before we ask Him, and stands pledged to bring us safely through all trials, and make everything work to the eternal good of them that love Him.

Mammon, at best, can do but little for us. Mammon cannot give us a single good that we can carry with us into eternity. Not a pleasure, not a possession can it give its devotees that they can take with them when they come to die. Mammon can make misers and shrivel our nature into a miserable selfishness. Mammon can make us proud, heartless, and tyrannical, but renders us utterly destitute for the world to come. Mammon may make men feel as if they were little gods for every one to worship, but cannot ease a pain, heal a sickness, cure a fever, or enable one to live one moment longer. Mammon may greatly flatter its devotees, but is apt to plant thorns in their dying pillows, and leave the soul distressed and hopeless

in the final agony. Mammon may give a man great influence for the time, and bring around him many sycophantic friends, and secure him an elegant home, a fine funeral, and a showy tomb; but it cannot make him more genuinely respected, or secure for him favor in heaven.

Dear friends, there should be no trouble about what to choose in such a case as this. In the Church, or out of it, spiritual misfortune, disappointment, and eternal ruin must come of persistence in the worship of Mammon; and people only deceive themselves by thinking to serve both God and Mammon. Jesus says *it cannot be*. There is, then, but one alternative,—but one hope; and that is, to give our hearts' devotion to the only true and saving Lord, who stands before us and says, "If any man serve Me, him will my Father honor." There is no sublimer Master,—no worthier or nobler service,—no surer way to happiness and eternal blessedness. And if we would make a choice never to be regretted, here is our opportunity and now is the time. It will not do to say—"After a while,"—"time enough yet,"—"when earthly cares are less pressing,"—the word from heaven says, "*Now* is the accepted time,—Now is the day of salvation,"—"Choose you *this day* whom ye will serve." God help us each and all to the right decision, and give us grace to stand to it faithfully to the end!

A Standing Proclamation.

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.—JNO. 6 : 37.



IN this promise many now singing the song of Moses and the Lamb once hung their fainting spirits, and it carried them safely through guilt, through temptation, through death. So says a great American preacher. And it is the same to-day that it ever was. Its freedom is not restrained, its grace is not diminished, its Giver's power is not abridged. It stands now, for every soul to take hold on, as true, as gracious, as firm, and as transcendant as when it first came from the lips of Jesus. O that He, with whom is the residue of the Spirit, would shed forth His light upon it, and upon our hearts, as we contemplate it !

I. See here *a word of explanation* of what true Christianity is. The text shows us the Christ, stationed in the midst of a world of homeless and needy ones, as the centre and source of ample supplies and consolations for all, claiming to be both able and willing to bestow them on every

one. And what is this but the very heart of the Gospel?

The centre of Christianity is Christ. He is its beginning, middle, and end. Everything belonging to it groups about Him. In its object and its subject. He is the All and in all. What the sun is to the planetary system, Christ is to the system of salvation. He carries all, sustains all, vivifies all; and without Him it is nothing. In our faith, in our hopes, in our prayers, in our songs, in our aims, in our desires, in our emotions, and in all our thoughts and experiences as Christians, He is the Alpha and the Omega. The best sermons, the best hymns, the best Liturgies, the best lives, are those which have in them the most of Christ. Everything objective in Christianity centres in Christ. Coming to Him comprehends all. Coming to Him we believe and confess Him, put our trust in Him, and consent to give Him our hearts. Coming to Christ means faith, repentance, and conversion. It means prayer, baptism, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Coming to Christ we become Christians, and find place among the saved.

II. See here *a word of blessed encouragement* to the troubled and anxious. It says to every weary and heavy-laden sinner, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." He has come, not in the terrors of justice to arraign and condemn; but meek, and having salvation. The word is, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." It

matters not for blood or nationality. It matters not for condition, rank, or standing in the world. It matters not for age or condition in life. It matters not for the depth of guilt, the time wasted in sin, the number or the turpitude of offences. It may be a Manassah, who filled the streets of Jerusalem with blood ;—it may be a Mary Magdalene, driven and tossed with seven devils ;—it may be a Saul, whose very breath was slaughter and havoc to God's saints ;—it may be the thief in the last extremity of suffering for his crimes ;—it may be the man who swung the lash that lacerated the back of the Son of God ;—it may be the soldier that drove the nails into his hands and feet, or thrust the spear into His side ;—it may be the lowest and the worst of Adam's children—no matter, *any one* that cometh to Him He will in no wise cast out. The word is absolute and without limit. No one is outside of its range. Whosoever *will may* come, and he that cometh shall not be rejected. The declaration in the original has a double negative, making the language the strongest possible, that Jesus *will not* cast out any one who comes to Him.

And what He spoke with His lips is illustrated and confirmed in His history and providence. There is no case in any records of a sinner come to Him who met with repulse and rejection. In all His career on earth we see His tender willingness and delight to raise up trophies of His grace, albeit from among the chief of sinners—from among persecutors and blasphemers—from among

publicans and harlots—even to the shamed thing dragged before Him in the temple. In no age, in no land, under no circumstances did the Lord of glory ever spurn from Him an humble sinner fallen at His feet to plead for His forgiveness. And if anything is true of Him, this is true, that whosoever cometh to Him He is willing and ready to receive, and help, and welcome.

Precious assurance! Hear it, ye people of oft-repeated and oft-broken vows, whose promises lie on God's altar unredeemed, whose solemn covenants and pledges lie strewn in shattered fragments all along your path. Hear it, ye souls bowed down with chagrin and torment at contemplation of your unmanliness and guilt. Let go all further trust in self, and put your unworthy hands in Christ's to walk as little children by His side. For He hath sympathy for you; and whosoever cometh unto Him He will in no wise cast out.

III. See here *a word of pregnant promise*. If Jesus will not cast out the soul that comes to Him, the implication is that He will receive it; and, being received, it must needs have a home and fellowship with Him. Coming to Christ with the continuity which the word implies means no more separation. Coming to Him, we become His, and He becomes ours, and there is a joining from both sides into an everlasting unity of fellowship, interest, fortune, and destiny. What is His becomes ours, and what is ours becomes His. His unfailing righteousness becomes our righteousness; His

merit our plea; His victory our victory; His spirit our spirit; His kingdom our kingdom; His Father our Father; His home our home. In all respects, *where He is* there shall we be also; for we thus become joint-heirs with Him to eternal glory.

We can conceive of many things from which Christ might cast us out. He might cast us out from His pity, His forbearance, His compassion, and His love. He might cast us out from the benefits of His mediation, from His forgiveness, from the influences of His Spirit, from the aid of His intercessions, and from all the consolations of His grace. He might cast us out from His Kingdom, from part in the resurrection of the just, from His friendly recognition in the day of judgment, and from the joys of heaven. And from all these must those be severed who come not to Him. But from the dreadfulness of such calamity we may read the blessedness of those whom He will not cast out. His love, tenderness, and compassion for them shall never cease. His mediation, His grace, His forgiveness, His righteousness, His Spirit, and His intercessions ever avail for them. All the power, and the riches, and the dominion, and the glory, and the triumph over death and hell, and the immortal empire awarded Him by the Father they shall share. And as He liveth and reigneth in glory without end, so shall they live and shine amid the thrones and principdoms of eternity, as His imperishable stars.

What shall we say, then, to these things! The Christ is here. The redemption He proposes is itself the evidence that we need it. And to all the bruised, mutilated, disabled, faint, and despairing souls that lie scattered, and groaning, and helpless all over the surface of the world, His sympathetic and compassionate word is, "*Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.*" Nor can we do a better or a wiser thing than to avail ourselves of such a Patron. No greater honor can come to man than to be joined to such a Prince and Saviour. No sublimer happiness can we ever hope to reach than that of identification with the status, glory, and destiny of the Heir of all things.

Dear friends, we often doubt and wonder, can the Saviour really be so good as to receive and welcome creatures so faulty as we? With all our many errands to His house, His altar, and His throne, imploring to be numbered with His saints, and with all our longing and wrestling to secure His great salvation, doubts and shadows often come over the soul, and we question if we may hope to be among the saved. Nor am I surprised that faith itself should sometimes stagger when we contemplate our unworthiness. But if Christ will cast out none who come to Him, why should we fear? If no weaknesses, no stubborn roots of remaining earthiness, no defects, no infirmities, no sinfulness in the past, can bar the way to His favor, why need we despair? If the worn-out slaves of sin and Satan may have redemption

through His blood, shall not His own children, hungering for His grace, be allowed to count themselves among His saved ones? If the fraudulent Zaccheus could find salvation, and the thief, dying for his crimes, could have the doors of Paradise opened to receive his departing soul, and the persecuting Saul of Tarsus could obtain forgiveness, and be accepted as a child and apostle of God for whom is reserved an eternal crown of righteousness, why may not the Marys that sit at His feet, and the Johns that lean on His bosom, and the Peters that stand up for His defence, hope to be welcomed on the same terms to the same transcendent blessedness?

And though we may yet have many corruptions to subdue, and many trials to endure, and many temptations to overcome, and many antagonisms to resist, rendering many more errands to the throne of grace necessary in order to a final triumph, we still may come without let or hindrance, and find shelter in the Rock that is higher than we. And even if we have been faithless to our calling, dishonored our profession, denied our Lord, and grieved His loving heart by mortal sin, the doors of mercy are still wide open to us, and the tender voice of invitation is, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal you." Through the tears of ingenuous shame we still may see forgiveness in His grieved and gentle look, and be sure that He would have us take hold again upon His everlasting covenant. For whosoever cometh to Him He will in no wise cast out.

Ye dying sons of men,
Immersed in sin and woe,
The Gospel voice attend,
Which Jesus sends to you :
Ye perishing and guilty, come,
In Jesus there is plenteous room.

Believe the heavenly Word
His messengers proclaim ;
He is a gracious Lord,
And faithful is His Name.
Backsliding souls, return and come ;
Cast off despair, in Christ there's room.

Benedictions upon the Wrestler.

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity.

I will be as the dew unto Israel : he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread ; and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.—HOSEA 14 : 5, 6.

ISRAEL was the name given to Jacob when he wrestled with the Jehovah-Angel, and conquered to himself the divine blessing. It is a name which primarily refers to spiritual qualities. It describes the characteristics of those who succeed in their endeavors to secure the divine favor. He who wrestles to win the grace and benediction of God, and perseveres in his efforts until he prevails, is a true Israel.

It is a name which describes every Christian, for Christian life is the struggle to secure and retain the divine favor and blessing. There is deadly wrath against us by reason of our sins, and we are exiled now. The goal of our existence is to get back into reconciliation and peace. For this also every right man longs, and prays, and wrestles, as did Jacob. Knowing and feeling his unworthiness and guilt, he cannot give up the

effort nor demit the struggle to secure so great a boon. Many are indifferent, and give themselves little or no concern about it; but every genuine Israel strives and agonizes to be on terms with God and to have His blessing.

Nor are such efforts without good hope of success. Jacob wrestled for the divine benediction, and he prevailed and got it. God is not inexorable. He is willing to be entreated even by those who have wronged Him most. In our own strength and merit no one can win; but earnestly pleading the mediation, mercy, and promises of Jesus, and persevering with a determination never to leave off, God himself will yield to our entreaty and acknowledge us as victors. It may cost us suffering, but we shall prevail.

Notice then the items of blessing here promised to every such spiritual wrestler.

God says, "*I will be as the dew to Israel.*" Gently and invisibly the dew distills upon the world, refreshing, comforting, and sustaining the drooping vegetation. And thus God promises to bless all who earnestly seek His favor. What a joy to the thirsting and famishing soul to learn that wrath is gone, and that condemnation is effectually turned away! What a blessed cheer comes with the Gospel word of pardon and peace! Like a balmy and healing moisture from heaven, it brings hope, and life, and gladness. God is ever graciously with His struggling people. His hand upholds them. His promises cheer them. His comforts delight them. His graces enliven

and sustain them. In spite of all earth's drawbacks and nature's infirmities, they are blessed; for God is to them as the dew upon the grass.

And the further promise to every such wrestler is: "*He shall grow as the lily.*" There be many plants which cannot stand the frosts of winter nor the heat of summer; but the lily is one of those bulbous growths that carry in them such a store of life-elements as to enable them to live and thrive when other plants are blasted and dead. And as with the lily, so with every true Israel. By the mercy and grace of God he is furnished with vitality and grace against all times of adversity, trial, and despair. He has vigor and substance enough in his "root of faith" to withstand the winter's frosts and the summer's drought. He abides and puts forth in freshness and thrift when others are cut down as the grass or wither as the green herb. The grace of God is sufficient for him, making him strong amid weakness, joyous in tears, and triumphant even in seeming defeat. As the lily, He grows and flourishes.

Furthermore, "*He casteth forth his roots as Lebanon.*" Here is the idea of strength, firmness, and deep-seated power. Lebanon is Palestine's greatest mountain. It rises out of the earth's deep bosom and bathes its snowy summit in heaven. It is remarkable for its "roots,"—its great rocky buttresses, which it sends out even into the sea. And so every true Israel's position is fixed and firm, as if rooted in the world's heart and girded by the granite framework of the

mountains. His foundation is the Rock of Ages. Nor waves nor storms can move or displace Him. There are many weaklings in the world, driven about by every wind of doctrine, and ready to yield to every new wave that comes. But the genuine Christian knows whom He has believed, and holds fast with an unfaltering trust. Nothing can drive or dislodge him from the precious faith on which his immortal hopes are built. Such at least is the birthright and privilege of every true child of God; and the grace for it is ours if we do but seek to avail ourselves of it.

There is likewise an excellent expansiveness pledged to Christian life and experience. A mountain does not grow. But of the true Israel it is said, "*His branches shall spread.*" Living Christianity means growth and aggression into the beyond. The genuine believer increases in faith, grows in grace, develops in knowledge, and strengthens in faithfulness, activity, and conquest. If we be Christians indeed, we will never rest with past experiences, attainments, and accomplishments. The aim is ever to become better, more holy, more Godlike, more useful. There is a continual branching out into new fields, new efforts, and higher achievements. The Spirit of God is a living and active Spirit; and the indwelling of that Spirit makes it our life, our privilege, and our glory, to become wiser, more dutiful, more energetic, more effective, and more mature for heaven, every year that we live. And whatever we may have experienced or achieved in the

past, it belongs to our Christian life and character to be ever ready and anxious to do greater things, and to put ourselves forth in ever-spreading branches. Wearying in well-doing is a prognostic of failure in the end. We must on, and ever on, while life and strength are given us. Planted and girded like Lebanon's Mountain, we are to spread our branches like Lebanon's Cedars, even as the trees which the Lord hath planted.

And with all this comes *beauty*,—beauty like that of the olive tree, modest in external presentations, but specially pleasing and attractive in inward fibre and richness of fruitage. A true Christian character is a beautiful character;—beautiful in texture, beautiful in tendency, aim, and fruitfulness. Let men say and think what they will; when the final verdict is reached its purport will be that

A Christian is the highest style of man.

His religion is not a mere creed, but an experience, a life,—not a mere restraint, but an inspiration,—not only an insurance for the next world, but a programme and guide for this. Everything concerning him takes on peculiar attractiveness. Ignorance, prejudice, depravity, and a perverted understanding, may decry and hate him; but when he truly embodies what was so sweetly exemplified in Jesus, no right-minded man can deny his spiritual beauty. There is beauty in holiness,—beauty in its creation,—beauty in its development,—beauty in its pos-

session,—beauty in what it inspires, and beauty in what it achieves. Both in life and in death the good Christian is beautiful. The beauty of the Lord is upon him, like the beauty of angels.

And hence also his life is fragrant. "*His smell is as Lebanon.*" His quiet influence, like the name of Jesus, "is as ointment poured forth." Paul says of Christians, "By us God maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge in every place." As a man lives near to God, and is faithful to his Christian confession, there goes forth from him a peculiar aroma to refresh and cheer. From his life, his conversation, his prayers, his charities, and his good deeds there issues a sweet odor to make the world better for his presence. Even those who walk not with him feel the good that he exhales, and in their hearts respect him more than they do one of themselves. He is a benediction to society, for such are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Like the precious cedars of Lebanon, the savor of his life regales and blesses wherever his influence reaches.

From this then, dear friends, we may see what practical Christianity is. It is a constant struggle and wrestling to secure and retain the favor and blessing of God. There must be a conquering to this end or we are undone. We must surmount the hindrances in the way, or true peace and home we cannot have. And though in our own strength alone we never could succeed, the Jehovah-Angel has come to us. On Him we can take hold. Nor

can we fail if we will but persevere. As Christians, we are all in this struggle. Fortunately it is not a hopeless wrestle. Success is sure if we only keep at it, determined never to give it up.

And blessed are the promises to those who are faithful. God will be as the dew to them. They shall grow as the lily. They shall be planted and girded like Lebanon, with affections in heaven even while living on earth. Growth, expansion, and blessing, and beauty shall mark their career. And when they pass away, the sweet savor of their lives shall linger long after they are gone.

To this our calling then let us be true, determined, and inflexible. It is the best we can do amid the infirmities, sins, and sufferings of this unsatisfying world. It will lift us highest and make us happiest of anything that can enlist our hearts and energies. And whatever adversities or trials may attend it here, they cannot last and will only add to the glory of the victory. For "if God be for us, who can be against us?"

The Message of Consolation.

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.—ISA. 40 : 1, 2.



OD has a people. It is made up of those whom He has called and chosen to serve and honor Him. All the circumcised seed of Abraham, who accepted the Lord's covenant, and confessed Jehovah as their God, were His people in the time Isaiah wrote. And all those who have been baptized into the Church of Christ, and confess Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, are, in the same sense, His people now. There were those of old who were Jews only outwardly, and whose circumcision was that of the flesh and not of the heart; and so there be those now who have the form of godliness, and are outwardly rated as members of the Church, but who are not inwardly and in truth members of the communion of saints. God's true people are they who confess His word and name, accept and observe His ordinances, and with heart and soul believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their hope and salvation.

It may seem a little paradoxical that God's people,—those who have Him for their Father and Lord,—should be in need of comfort. Natural reason would suppose that people so highly distinguished as to be Jehovah's own would be lifted entirely above the common lot of mortals and would never want for consolation. But it is here implied that they may and do have sorrow. And when we inquire particularly into their case we find them always more or less the children of affliction while sojourning in this world. They have much with which they would not part; but they also have much to bear. Jesus said of all His followers, in the world ye shall have tribulation. They are here chained to a body of death from whose clogging weight and infirmities they are never free. Sin still works in their members. The world they live in is adverse. Satan still assails them with his temptations. They often find themselves impelled and driven into what they would fain avoid. God Himself often leads them into wildernesses of trial and hardship, and makes the fires hot about them, that He may the more thoroughly purge out their sins, chasten their spirit, prove their sincerity, strengthen their graces, and develop them into a purer and better saintship. Hence the forty years of wandering in the desert. Hence the long contests with the Canaanites after the crossing of the Jordan. Hence the sore captivity of seventy years in Babylon. Nor is there any exemption or escape from affliction and sorrow of one kind

or another. Though they be God's people in deepest reality and truth, they still have need of comfort.

But God has comfort for His people. Of old He covenanted with Israel that He would be their God, and that they should be His people. By virtue of that covenant they were distinguished, honored, and blest beyond all others. They stood to God as no other people stood, and God stood to them as He stood to none others upon earth. He had them under His own special protection, and performed toward them all the offices of a true and faithful God. When they were oppressed and tried His ear was open to their cries. When in want He was ever present to supply them. When in darkness He gave them light, and served as their guide and help in all their straits. And what He was to Israel of old He is to His people still. By faith grafted in upon the same original olive-tree, all Christians occupy the same relation to Him that ancient Israel did. Baptized into His Name, and conjoined with the assembly of the saints, His covenant is with us, and we are His people, and He is our God.

It is not easy to take in all the meaning and preciousness that belong to the relation thus established. God is a being of exhaustless fullness. His powers and possessions are endless. And in making Himself *our God*, He makes over to us all that He has and is. Holding His place and prerogatives as God, He holds them for our good,

and for our blessing and salvation. He makes Himself, as it were, our property,—puts Himself to our use and service,—gives us the advantage and profit of all His ineffable Godhead. Everything that an almighty and eternal Being can be to us in the way of helping, keeping, and serving us, He makes Himself over to be to us.

When Israel rebelled and forsook Him He afflicted and chastised them. Again and again His hand was heavy upon them, and His sore judgments overtook them for their sins. But He still did not cease from being their God, to whom they might penitently return and still find Him the same merciful and loving God and Father. If He afflicted them, it was still for their good, that they might turn from their follies and have experience of His goodness. And such a God He is still to all who believe on His Name.

This, then, is the first and great source and subject of comfort and consolation to God's people. He has entered into covenant with them to be *their God*. 'This is a full offset to all their afflictions. Hence the divine Word is, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." By virtue of His covenant with us, we have a God who cannot fail us. He lives forever, and His mercy is everlasting. All that can harm us is under His control, and all that can help us is at His command. His

ear is never heavy that it cannot hear, nor His hand shortened that He cannot save. Be the situation what it may, He is ours to bring us through,—ever our own faithful God.

Two further items of comfort are named. The prophet was to tell Jerusalem that her iniquity is pardoned and her warfare accomplished. Great was her guilt. She had sinned against light and love. She had turned aside unto idols. She had stoned and killed the prophets sent unto her. She had piled up iniquity on iniquity. But still there was pardon for her; and that pardon was proclaimed as a present and living reality, if she would believe and receive it.

And so, through Christ, there is now offered and proclaimed a present, complete, and everlasting forgiveness to all who consent to be and remain God's people. Jesus hath borne our sins in His own body on the tree. By His precious blood He hath expiated our offences. The iniquities of us all were laid on Him, and He hath answered for them. And no matter how many or great our sins have been, there is now no more condemnation, if we only accept the pardon which the Gospel preaches to us. It is not a pardon to be worked out by our prayers, penances, and good deeds. It is not a pardon that is to be ours only at some future time, when a certain probation is passed. It is not a pardon simply for some of our sins, or which sets us only partially free. It is a perfect pardon, already complete, covering every iniquity, and exonerating us from all

condemnation if we will only believe and receive it.

There is nothing so dreadful as to be under the condemnation and wrath of Almighty God. It puts upon us a curse as terrible as the agony which wrung the Saviour's soul. It fastens upon us an amount of ill which no tongue can tell, which no effort can escape, and which no being can stand up under. If death could swallow one up in the horrors of annihilation, it would not be a fraction of the calamity involved in the endurance of the irremediable wrath of God. And in proportion to the dreadfulness of such a woe is the preciousness and comfort of the pardon proclaimed to us in Christ. Even men of the liveliest faith do not half appreciate it. It carries in it an immeasurable abundance of blessing and consolation.

And we can have it for the acceptance of it! Did men but realize it what a comfort is here! Failing to appreciate it, they miss the joy of an unspeakable blessing. Therefore the heralds of God are commanded to lift up their voices, to throw into them the utmost emphasis, and to proclaim with fullest energy and earnestness that the decree is passed that mercy has prevailed, that pardon is granted, that the great condemnation is gone. And if we did but know and realize it, here is a comfort and a joy for God's people which should make them forever glad.

And as the result of this absolution, and connected with it as part of the same glad proclamation, there is the further announcement that all

present adversities and calamities are nearing their termination. The word is, "speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that *her warfare is accomplished*." The metaphor is military, and the meaning is that the time of her hard service, her subjugation, and her misery was now touching upon its limit,—that the era of freedom and jubilee was about to dawn. The first reference may have been to the restoration from the Babylonian captivity, and thence to the nearing exemption from the old bondage to the burdensome exactions of the Mosaic laws; but it referred also to the final release from all burdens, aches, and disabilities.

In part the warfare is already over. The old law with its burdens, if not repealed, has had its penalty satisfied. It cannot bind nor condemn the believer in Jesus. The Devil's dominion has been broken, and he cannot oppress us now beyond what we are able to bear. He can no longer tyrannize over us by bringing up our sins, for they have all been cancelled in our Saviour's blood. Sin may still linger in our members, and much trouble us by its presence even when we would do the best; but its power is broken, and the Spirit so helpeth our infirmities that we need no longer be overwhelmed. We have an Advocate with the Father to maintain our cause. Here is comfort, and assurance, and consolation in which we may well rejoice and be glad, even in the midst of all the ills and trials that still remain. And the proclamation is that even these are near-

ing their end and about to vanish away. It is "but for a moment," and then will come the everlasting release.

Often are even the Lord's people made to sigh and cry, O to be rid of these aches and ills, these stripes and vexations, this exposure to adverse elements, vicissitudes, bereavement, and sorrow! O to be released from the decay of age, the power of disease, the bands and gloom and horribleness of death! O to be done with disappointments, and infidelities, and the harsh ingratitude that torture and afflict our souls! O for a life that ends not, a world that fades not, a holiness that errs no more! O for affections ever fresh, for faculties that never weary, for loving companionships which cannot be soiled nor sundered! But what they thus covet is not far away. The blessed consummation is nearer than they think. A little while, and we shall have done with earth's burdens and disabilities for ever. A little while and the ascended Saviour will come again to receive us unto Himself, to conduct us into the mansions He has gone to prepare for us, and to introduce us into the everlasting home of peace and rest. And with this we may comfort ourselves. Nor is there anything in being that can so cheer and gladden the jaded heart of man as just these assurances, which God proclaims to us by His holy word.

See, then, dear friends, the merciful tenderness of our heavenly Father. He would have us *comforted*. Though many a burden and trial be

upon us, He would not have us without consolation. He gives Himself to be a God to us in all our need of Him. He is most urgent in having us feel and know that our sins, though many, are all blotted out and taken clean away in the blood of Christ; and that what we yet suffer because of them is soon to be over for ever. And what more could we ask or wish? O the comfort and peace of a vigorous and confiding faith!

A Disastrous Choice.

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.

And Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom.—GEN. 13: 12.

WHEN people are called upon to make choice in life, and to branch out for themselves, they often make very unfortunate work of it. Even where there is nothing wrong or sinful in their choice, it is often very unwisely made, and what was chosen for superior good turns out for particular evil.

Lot thought he was doing a splendid thing for himself and his posterity when he choose this Jordan plain. He thought he was acting with very special foresight and consideration. "He lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, even as the garden of the Lord. And so he journeyed east, and pitched his tent toward Sodom."

Viewed from the hills toward Bethel, the Jordan circle was then a scene of enchanting loveliness. From either side of the wide outstretched plain the brooks and rivulets poured down from their mountain springs, and through the centre rolled the meandering river.

God loves beauty, and hence has imprinted it

on His works; and He has implanted the like instinct in the human soul. It was no fault in Lot that he admired and was drawn by the fascinations of the rich and splendid country that spread itself before him. It was a goodly land, and one desirable to dwell in, which, in the long after years, touched and fired the great soul of Moses himself as he looked down upon it from Nebo's summit.

Nor is it wrong in us in choosing and arranging our homes for ourselves and our children to seek out pleasant locations and to surround ourselves with what is pleasing to the eye and grateful to the imagination. As there is no sin in having elegant mansions, fair gardens, and fine pictures to look on, provided we can afford it; so neither is there evil in desiring fertile fields and well-watered lands, instead of being confined to barren rocks and parched moors. Whatever God has given of good and pleasantness it is the Christian's privilege to like, appropriate, and enjoy, if he has his choice, the same as any other. Monkish asceticism may enjoin self-mortifications in such matters, but it is no requirement of the good Father in heaven. And if places and things have in them suggestions dear to memory, they are all the more desirable and worthy of our regard. The Jordan plains reminded Lot of the home of man in his primeval days, and the blessedness of that time and place where the primal father of the race walked in innocence with God. Nor were any of these attractions to be despised in making

choice of a land and home for himself and his children.

But there were serious drawbacks. Bad neighbors are a great depreciation to any locality ; and the inhabitants of the villages in this Jordanic plain were very bad people and sinners of a very aggravated type.

We cannot avoid contact with bad people so long as we are in this world ; but it is good policy to have as little to do with them as possible. Mingling with and marrying into the families of the ungodly is what ruined the antediluvian world, and has ruined the peace and happiness of many worthy people in every age and country. The greatest mischief to the Church of God is the lowering and obliteration of the walls and fences between it and the world. Contiguity with the wicked begets ties and common interests with the wicked, predisposes to leniency toward their ill ways, and tends to draw the soul into what God cannot approve. Lot was a good man and quite settled in his faith, which had served to bring him from idolatrous Ur to where he might worship the true God in peace ; but even *he* was not proof against the deteriorating and corrupting influence of his bad associations. Human nature will always take on evil more readily than good. The contagion of a diseased man will impart disease to a dozen sound men, but the health of a sound man is not so readily imparted to one diseased. Example and the ways of society at large are very strong ; but they are always the strongest

in the bad direction. It is hard for Christians in any case to keep unspotted from the world. And it was a bad calculation for Lot that he did not take this into the account.

And if he should even be proof against the corrupting influence of his bad neighbors, his choice necessarily threw him into many sorrows and grievances by reason of them. We are told that his soul was often "vexed with their filthy conversations." Nevertheless, "Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom."

But there were several deeper faults and flaws in this move.

First of all, it was too avaricious in principle. The getting of the good lands was the main thought and aim. Whatever else might be risked, he wished above all to settle himself well with regard to earthly and outward gains, comforts, and possessions. It was by what his eyes saw that he was most led. And this is always a doubtful principle on which to act. When all other things are evenly balanced it may be allowed to decide; but to be controlled by the lusts of the eyes is to be led by cupidity to indulge a covetousness which is idolatry. God, the worship of God, and the bringing up of families in His fear and service, should be the first consideration in any move which a good man makes. Lot was a good man, but he suffered himself to be captivated with the idea of possessing a rich country. He did not mean to sacrifice his religion; but in his zeal for worldly comforts and possessions he omitted to

provide for its due protection. And here was his great mistake and a great flaw in his proceeding.

And this defect in principle also operated to beget a faulty selfishness and neglect with regard to the dues of others. Abraham had indeed given him right to choose as he pleased. It was a magnanimous generosity which submitted such an offer; and it called for some acknowledgment on the part of Lot. Abraham was the uncle, the elder, the rightful head and governor of the entire establishment. It was on Abraham that Lot had depended all the way through, both for his status as a worshipper of the true God, and for whatever of prosperity had attended his immigration to Canaan. It would have been eminently proper for him to throw the whole question back again to Abraham, who had the wiser head and the higher authority, and from whom he had had nothing but good and justice in all the years of their pilgrimage together. There was every reason to believe that Abraham would have made the very best disposition of the question possible. But Lot was too eager to secure what his eyes saw and his heart coveted, to refer the matter to his wise uncle and benefactor. The chance was before him, and he zealously grasped it, considering only himself, and leaving out all consideration of his uncle's interest, or his uncle's superior right to advise. This was selfish and ungrateful. But so young people sometimes act to their own detriment.

It may be our right to choose for ourselves,

without reference to any advice or wishes on the part of those above us, and without regard to what fathers, mothers, or those on whom we have been dependent might feel or wish; but it is very selfish and ungrateful to do it, and is very apt to work badly, and to bring many sad regrets. When God gives Abrahams to young Lots, it is not for nothing; and to leave them out of consideration in any case, is very unsafe, and an impropriety which never promises well.

Lot furthermore assumed risks and exposure, not only to his religious character and hopes, but also to everything he held dear on earth. He not only became entangled with bad neighbors and their ill ways, but also with their enemies. Pitching his tent *toward* Sodom, it was not long till we find him *in* Sodom, his daughters married to children of Sodom, his wife wrapped up in the society and possessions of Sodom, and himself powerless against the abominations of Sodom. Parting with Abraham and Abraham's counsel, he parted with the best influences that had ever been exercised over him. Calculating above all for his worldly advantage, he sorely suffered in the raid of the four kings, and finally lost all he had in the destruction which befell Sodom for its wickedness. He went down into those attractive plains a wealthy man, with a happy family, with every outward prospect of a prosperous life; but he came out stripped of all his possessions, his wife turned into a mound of salt, and his own life saved only so as by fire. It proved a general

ruin to his own peace and comfort in life, and threw a cloud over his character and over all his posterity. His wretchedness brought on by that move was pitiable in the extreme.

And yet Lot was not a bad man. We miss the point if we class him with hypocrites and unbelievers, or rate him with the irreligious and the careless. He meant it well, and was guilty of no particular sin in choosing as he did. But, like many otherwise good and well-meaning people, he did not consider. He did not act wisely. He let the worldly spirit influence him more than was meet. He acted with too much worldly eagerness and self-will. He over-estimated his ability to direct himself, and took no one's counsel. This was the spring of all his sad misfortune. And not all the faith and goodness that may be in men will serve to deliver them from the sad consequences of their mistakes when once they begin to act on the general principles of the world.

The case of Lot thus stands out as a beacon light to all Church people to be on their guard how they deal with themselves, even when not chargeable with any special sin. In every life, times and occasions come when choice is to be made,—when there must be a separation from the old connections and old dependencies to act for one's self. The youth leaving home, the choice of a profession, the changing of pursuits, the selection of new places of residence, the forming of new alliances, the starting of new homes, and

adventures to secure a better fortune, are all such times. And these are always critical times,—the times in which the greatest dangers come,—times which call for the devoutest and most thorough consideration. They are times in which mistakes and unwisdom, though not sinful in themselves, yet disastrously color and cloud the whole after-life, and bring evil on generations after us. The time comes to every one when he must pitch tent in some new direction; and pitching it toward Sodom may have in it everything to captivate and attract so far as the worldly eye can see; but it is a hazardous experiment, and in most cases, as in Lot's, it will result in sorrowful disaster.

Here then is a lesson for parents. You wish to give your children a pleasant inheritance, an attractive home, a situation in life of which they can be proud, and in which to be rich and happy. But what precautions have you taken to guard their religious interests, to keep them from evil associations and from alliances with the wicked? You are anxious to give them a home that shall be congenial to their health and physical welfare; but what have you thought of Church privileges, connection with the means of grace, association with people you can approve, and the opportunities for the health and salvation of their souls? What will your own example upon them necessarily be, if for worldly advantages you put yourselves down where there are no Abrahams nor Sarahs to keep up the spirit of faith and devotion, and no Church conveniences that you can ap-

prove, no houses of the Lord to which to take your children, that they may grow up in the fear and favor of God? You have had an eye to good lands, to pleasant locations, to fruitful fields, to business conveniences, to prosperous situations; but how far have you been considering the wants of your souls and of the souls of your households? You mean it well; but in how many instances is it Lot over again, pitching tent toward Sodom?

Here also is a solemn lesson for all young people and those making arrangements to settle themselves in life. You are looking to what pleases your fancy,—you are joining yourselves to companions, associates, and connections that must necessarily have a controlling influence over your whole earthly life,—you are fixing the character of your employment, your profession, your business relations, your place of residence, and the line of things in which you propose to spend your earthly existence,—you are closely calculating your chances, your greatest successes, your prospects of a good livelihood, your opportunities for winning a fortune, honor, or promotion in the world,—you are shaping matters that must shape your whole career. These things are more or less occupying your earnest thought and attention by day and by night. But what respect are you showing to the wishes and advice of your parents, your superiors, and those most capable and most anxious to have you do the best? You are striking out on your own account, and to act

for yourselves, where the old home influences will no longer be over you, and all your surroundings will undergo a change; and what consideration are you giving to the moral and religious bearings of your choice and movements? What account are you taking for your souls, the nurture and security of your faith and hopes toward God? What is the outlook for the influences and entanglements that may come from the choice you are making? Have you looked at the exposure and risk to which you are subjecting yourselves and yours in the eager pursuit of what so attracts and pleases your imagination? Alas, what multitudes of Lots do we find about us,—good and well-meaning indeed, but captivated with worldly fancies,—and *pitching their tents toward Sodom!*

And what a solemn lesson is here for all of us! We are continually choosing,—making new arrangements,—entering on new fields and experiments. The old order of things is ever and anon getting out of joint, dissolving, and pushing us out into new selections, enterprises, and attempts for the better. We cannot help it. Circumstances demand it. And we must again and again cast about for new departures. Much thought and anxiety are necessarily involved, and the moves we make are vitally related to all our future. What weight, then, are we giving to the spiritual, moral, and religious side of the matter? Is it Jordan's fair plains, or Abraham's God, that is the uppermost in our thoughts and calculations?

Ah, this pitching of tents toward Sodom,—this

throwing ourselves into associations with the wicked to please our earthly tastes and further our earthly comforts and fortunes,—this going down into the doomed world in hope of improving our comforts and estate,—what noble souls it has ruined,—what lives it has made wretched,—what ill ends it has brought on otherwise good people! Let us take warning then, dear friends, and beware of pitching our tents toward Sodom.

The Samaritan Woman.

Twentieth Sunday after Trinity.

How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.—
JOHN 4: 9, 10.



It is a striking fact that a Jew can generally be recognized. There is no disgrace in it, but it is hard for him to conceal or obliterate the peculiar indications of his race. No matter where he is born and reared, what language he speaks, what centuries or ages of naturalization have intervened, nothing can entirely wipe off his Jewish features. In Jerusalem, in Babylon, in Egypt, in Rome, in Tartary, and everywhere on earth, the discerning eye can detect a Jew. He belongs to a peculiar race, and always carries the marks of it. Nearly every nation has a general type of its own, but never so distinct and certain as that of the Jews, even after two thousand years of dispersion among the nations.

These Jewish marks could be recognized in Jesus also. "He took on Him the seed of Abra-

ham." But He did not try to conceal His Jewish kinship. He never attempted to play a double part in anything; neither should we. Life is too real, too solemn, too momentous, to admit of attempts at disguise. We are what we are in spite of all the masks we may wear; and we should never be ashamed to be and appear what our Creator made us, even where it may be to our disadvantage.

To the eye of this woman the speech, dress, and face of Christ bespoke a Jew, and He had no wish to make it seem otherwise. He *was* a Jew, and that fact was now in His way; but He would not be other than His true self.

He was now travelworn, thirsty, hungry, weary. He was waiting for bread; and He civilly asked for a drink of water. There was no just reason why it should not be given Him by a Samaritan woman, even if He was a Jew. Was He not a brother-man? Was He not partaker in the same common wants and deserving of the same humane consideration with other men? And why hesitate about bestowing a common civility upon a needy and worthy fellow-being only because he is of another party? This woman had done worse things than give a drink of water to a Jew. But party and prejudice are often much stronger than principle, and she must withhold the water while she vents her Samaritan spite and hatred, though a man should perish for want of a little water, and though the very Son of God was being struck by her taunts about His earthly kinship.

A worthier, greater, holier man than that weary and suppliant stranger she had never seen. A more deserving civility she could never bestow than that which was so respectfully requested and under the circumstances so eloquently entreated. But He was a Jew, and she a Samaritan; therefore He must be taunted, insulted, and for the time denied. Poor, narrow-hearted, malignant human nature! What is meaner than a vaunting pride of race, rank, caste, family, and clique? What is more ridiculous and absurd than the way some people prate and swagger about "society," family, and blood? And those who claim and proclaim the loudest generally have the worst record. A loose-lived Samaritan woman of mongrel parentage vaunts over the blood of David and the Son of God!

And well may we blush for the baseness of human nature, as well as wonder at the sublime humility and meekness of our adorable Saviour, as we contemplate this picture. A common beggar might have asked of the most honorable, and have received; but the great and glorious Messiah, for whom the ages waited, was only jeered as being a Jew when He asked a drink of water from a woman whose stained life should have shut her mouth about the relations of other people! Had Jesus caused her to drop dead at His feet, as Sapphira before the face of Peter, it would have been less than she deserved.

But there was no spirit of retaliation in that meek sufferer. He came not to destroy men's

lives, but to save them. He was not on earth to resent disrespect and reproach, but to pity the weaknesses and sins of humanity, and to suffer for its forgiveness and salvation. His only reply was: "*If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me drink; thou wouldst have asked Him, and He would have given thee living water.*"

From this answer of Christ two things appear.

I. We here get a glimpse of that good which Jesus came to impart to the children of men. He calls it "*The gift of God.*" Many and various are God's gifts. If we were to reckon them up, they would be as the sands of the sea, multiplied by the number of stars in the firmament, for multitude. And many of them are so great in worth that we cannot even begin to estimate their value. But with all, there is one which stands out in vast preëminence as "*The Gift*"—the Gift of gifts.

Nor ought there to be any difficulty in identifying it. Some would have us think of Christ as the gift. Others have taken it to be the Holy Ghost. And still others consider it the life eternal. But it is neither of these, contemplated singly. It is a complex of gifts and mercies. It is the gift of God's only Son, Jesus Christ; it is the gift of the Holy Ghost; and it is the gift of eternal life; all these, and whatever else pertains to our salvation.

Redemption is *one*. However complex the particulars in which it consists, or is procured, or is

imparted it is everywhere contemplated in the singular, and as the paramount and all-crowning donation of almighty goodness. "God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." This tells the whole story. The Lord Jesus is in this gift; and everlasting life is in it; and the activities of the Holy Ghost are in it; and so all the facts and items which go along with Christian life and hopes, even to glory everlasting. Nothing less than this is the preëminent Gift of God; and nothing less than this does He bring within the reach of all to whom He comes, and even to this insolent woman and her mongrel kin.

He further calls it "*Living water.*" One of the gladdest things in the world is pure, fresh, springing water. It is one of God's most precious life-gifts to the world. And to this the Saviour here likens the good which the Gospel brings. Where it comes it carries blessed rejuvenation. Where it is received sinking strength recovers, and dying life rekindles, and perishing souls recover, a thousand springs are set a flowing with gladness, and everything sings and rejoices with new-begotten life! Where there was barrenness there is a putting forth for happy fruitfulness. Where there was desolation there is bloom and joy. Where there was rocky hardness there is genial soil. Where there was thirst and famishing there is satisfaction and blessedness. Where there was filthiness, dust and death, there is sanc-

tification, beauty, and unfading glory. Yea, such and so precious is the good which Jesus brings to the famished children of men.

Nor can it come without Him. He brings it. He gives it. All the blessings and privileges of the covenant of grace come through Him. He tells this woman of Sychar that it was His prerogative to give the living water. He is the true Rock of Horeb whence the gushing streams come forth to give life to perishing Israel. For this purpose was He smitten by the rod of the law. For this was His body broken and His heart rifted. For this He lives and is ever with His Church, even unto the end of the world. From His cross forgiveness flows. From His throne the Holy Spirit is sent. And through His word and sacraments He comes to us with life for evermore.

II. We may here also see *why so many fail to get the benefit of this heavenly good.*

The first hindrance is *ignorance*. The Saviour tells this woman that if she had *known the Gift of God*, and who it was that was conversing with her, she would have asked, and He would have given her living water. But as yet she did not know Him nor the gift of God; and so she was without the living water, and showed no anxiety to possess it. A like ignorance is that which keeps many from salvation and from solicitude about their souls. People treat religious things with indifference, neglect, and contempt without meaning any harm by it. The trouble is that

they do not *know* what they are doing, what treasures they are allowing to pass from them, what blessedness they are trampling under foot. They may be wide awake on other things. They may be intelligent and wise in temporal and secular affairs. They may understand politics, finance, business, and the laws of ordinary life and success. They may be learned in the sciences, the stars, the rocks, the plants, the animals. They may be skilled in history, in laws, in languages, in art, in mechanism. They may even be great authorities in some departments of knowledge. But they are indifferent about the preëminent things of man's salvation and eternal life. And the reason is that they *know not the gift of God*. They do not understand it. They have no appreciation of it. Even when they have it brought to them, and the very voice and words of the Son of God are sounded in their ears, and everything is so clearly presented that they themselves can rehearse it, they do not take in, nor realize, nor know what tremendous things they are dealing with, nor what unspeakable treasures are thus brought to them. They know not the gift of God, nor who it is that is speaking with them. Seeing, they see not; and hearing, they do not understand. They perceive no commanding worth, no pressing necessities, no motions of eternal Deity for their redemption. The great and all-crowning gift of heaven comes to them, is on all sides of them, is filling their eyes and ears, and they themselves are conversing with it all the while; and yet they

do not perceive, do not understand, do not take in; and Christ and salvation pass for nothing. They drink and drink of their earthly wells, and ever come back thirsty as ever, and know not that the spring of salvation is at hand flowing with living water, which he who drinks shall never thirst again. They fail of the transcendent good of the divine munificence, and remain in their unsanctity and destitution, self-satisfied and self-secure, and even sneering at the world's Redeemer, because they do not know the grace of God and the time of their visitation. Their misery is their ignorance and the cherished blindness of their unsanctified hearts.

Another hindrance is *prejudice*. But for her Samaritan dislike of Jesus, and the pique of her people against the Jewish claims and professions, she would have treated Christ in a very different way. And so it is perpetually. There is an immense amount of Samaritan prejudice and resentment in the irreligious world. Is it a religious book or lecture? That is enough to damn it in their regard and esteem. Any subject is more palatable to them than the subject of the salvation of their souls. They will hear us willingly and meet us on social terms, if only we will not talk religion to them. Of all men there are none whom they more despise than these sanctimonious people, who are ever preaching up church and religious devotion. They would at any time rather witness a play than hear a sermon, or join in a dance than in a prayer. They are impatient

and ill at ease the moment they detect a disposition to influence them to the duties of piety and the ordinances of God. They never talk of these matters, and do not wish to be talked to about them. They have a feeling of aversion to the whole thing. They would think themselves belittled to become earnest Christian men and women. They despise the thought of it. They are full of resentment and censoriousness toward all these goody people, and would rather keep aloof. They would as soon see them driven from the community, from society, and from all respectable consideration. If they had their way, they would smite them at all points. And more or less of this feeling is in every unsanctified heart. Hence there is much incivility toward Christ and the people who belong to Him. There is a prejudice, breeding all sorts of ill manners, which would be considered intolerable except as against religious things and religious professors. And this prejudice—this aversion toward Christ as a Jew—this unwillingness to treat respectfully with Him and His servants,—is the secret cause why so many fail to know the gift of God, or to secure to themselves the water of life.

But the greatest hindrance of all is, that people do not *ask* Christ for this living water. Christ tells this woman that if she had understood and *asked*, He would have given her what would have made her blessed for ever. But she did not *ask*, and the implication is that He could not impart this living water so long as it was not wanted and

solicited. The gifts and privileges of the Gospel are freely made to all, but they are possessed by none but those who seek them by faith and prayer. Anxious as Christ was to bestow His mercies upon the suffering and needy, He always drew from them first a confession of their misery and some earnest prayer for His help. In the great promises which are yet outstanding to Jehovah's ancient people, there is still this condition added: "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Though God knows what things we have need of before we ask Him, He yet commands us "by prayer and supplication to make our requests known unto Him." The word and law respecting all His glorious benefactions is, "*Ask*, and it shall be given you; *seek*, and ye shall find; *knock*, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that *asketh*, receiveth; and he that *seeketh*, findeth; and to him that *knocketh*, it shall be opened." God is more willing to give His Holy Spirit, than earthly parents to give good things to their children; but only "*to them that ask Him.*" "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." And the grand reason why so few ever find and secure eternal life is, because they never seek and never obediently ask of God to give it them. They are earnest and anxious enough about other matters. They are intent in their several

pursuits of business, pleasure, or self-promotion. They are eager to add field to field, and to join house to house. And they fondly anticipate a time when they may say to themselves, "Soul, take thine ease, for thou has much goods laid up for many years." But for the great things of the life eternal, and the inheritance that fadeth not away, they have no zeal to show, no prayers to offer, no earnest application to make!

How is it, then, dear friends, with you? To us, as to this woman of Sychar, has the Saviour come. By the side of all these earthly wells whither people come to drink only to thirst again, He sits with living water to slake all thirst for ever. To this woman there was some degree of excuse for not knowing Christ; but what excuse can we plead for not knowing Him? If any among us are strangers to His character, gifts, and offers, it is not because we have not abundant opportunity to be familiar with them. If any one listening to me now has never made an earnest and honest application to Him for the water of life, it is not because there has been no chance, no call, no necessity for it. What answer, then, do you propose to give for not knowing the Gift of God, and not asking share in those living waters which spring up into eternal life? On what plea do you think to rest when the day of judgment comes and finds you uncleansed, unbaptized, unsanctified, and destitute of God's saving grace? This unclean, uncivil, and unpromising Samaritan woman, yet listened, and

inquired, and was saved; and so may we all. But it can only be by repenting out of our old prejudice, indifference, and neglect, and taking Jesus as our Teacher, our Messiah, and our Lord.

O that men might but know the gift of God, and who it is that stands in meek weariness, pleading with them to come to Him that they might have life! And if any here are still without a saving interest in Christ, let them open their eyes and see, and open their ears and hear, and open their mouths and ask, lest He pass them by, and leave them to perish for ever.

The Tears of Jesus.

Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity.

And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it.—LUKE 19 : 41.

TEARS are no strange thing in our world. Since the day that Adam went weeping from Eden the earth has never ceased to be a vale of tears. Abraham, and Isaac, and Joseph wept. Hezekiah, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezra, and Nehemiah wept. And Peter and Paul wept. When David fled from the rebellion of Absalom he went up the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went, and all the people that were with him “went up weeping as they went.” According to Homer, Achilles and Ulysses wept. History tells that Alexander, and Cæsar, and Cato, and Brutus, and Scipio, and Napoleon wept. And there be few men that have ever lived, however great or small, who never wept.

But here we have an instance of an outburst of tears altogether peculiar and specially remarkable. Here was a man, the most exalted in His nature, His offices, and His power, that ever walked in flesh and blood,—a Divine man,—a God-man—the only begotten of eternal Deity,—

whose voice could still the tempest and raise the dead,—whose touch could heal the leper, give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to the dumb,—suddenly deluged with a flood of tears. Who would have anticipated such a thing from such a Being?

It was in the midst of a grand triumphal procession. He was mounted as a prince. A rejoicing multitude was with Him. Men were strewing His path with green, and laying down their garments for Him to ride upon. As the prophet predicted, it was the King of Zion coming into the holy City. Multitudes going before, and multitudes following after, were making the hill-sides ring with loud and prolonged Hosannas to Him as the Son of David, and the long-expected Prince of peace. But in the midst of all this enthusiasm and loud acclaim, He was melted into tears. What was the cause and meaning of such an outburst, from such a personage, at such a time?

Men sometimes weep for joy over great successes, or when unexpected honors are conferred upon them; but it was not so here. These tears were accompanied with words, and they uttered only painful lamentation.

Knowing what was about to happen to Him in that city, we might suppose that He was thus affected in anticipation of what He was presently to endure. Was it then the foresight of the treachery of Judas, the mock trials, buffetings, and derisions that awaited Him, and the change

of these loud swelling Hosannas into the horrid cry of Crucify him ! crucify him ! Was it that He foresaw three crosses raised on Calvary's summit, and himself writhing in agony and blood on one of them, crucified with thieves and murderers ? No, not the remotest allusion to anything of this was in His words ; and when the women that followed Him on the way to the cross bewailed and lamented Him He said to them, " Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and your children." He had no tears to shed in view of His own sufferings and death ; for He knew that the way of the cross was the way to the throne.

Quite another matter was here the burden of His thoughts. Before Him stood the beautiful city, so sacred for a thousand years, the joy of the whole earth, with its walls, and towers, and palaces, and gold-roofed Temple,—the house of prayer for so many generations,—the dwelling-place of Jehovah whence He dispensed His favors to so many sacred prophets and noble kings and sacrificing worshippers,—the city of Israel's solemnities, with its thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David, and for the peace and prosperity of which the prayers of the devout had ascended from age to age. But beautiful as that city shone in its sacredness, and history, in that morning's bright sunlight, its day of salvation was past. By its unbelief and determined rejection of the Christ for whom it had been so long waiting its doom was sealed. Behind that vision

of beauty and blessed memories there rose another scene when those thronged streets should be piled with dead; those proud buildings wrapt in flames; those sacred spaces resounding with curses, execrations, and unanswered cries for mercy; that holy temple levelled with the ground; the Roman eagles perched upon those walls; the Holy of Holies abandoned by its God; the city of David reduced to a field of blackened ruins, and its myriad population among the unpardoned dead, or scattered to the four winds! And this was the soreful contemplation that drew these tears.

But we must not suppose that it was merely the fall of Judea's capital, the overthrow of tower and palace and temple, the deportation and enslavement of the people of His country, sad and affecting as this would be to a loving and patriotic heart. There was a spiritual ruin in the contemplation that moved Him most of all. It was the shutting out of the light of life and salvation to the people who had sinned away their day of grace by steeling their hearts against the testimonies and pleadings of the Christ, and were now about to crucify their own Messiah. For their good He had come into the world, and lived, and taught, and wrought; and for their salvation He was about to lay down His life; but they as a nation would none of Him, and took upon their souls the guilt of His blood. And for their fate in eternity, as well as in time, He could not suppress the sad emotions of His loving and tender heart.

And of great and solemn moment to us, dear friends, are these tears of Jesus.

They are instructive tears. They tell of His tender love and compassion for sinners. He does not willingly become a Judge and avenger. It hurt and wounded His great soul to see men determined and set in unbelief and rejection of His saving mercy. His Gospel rejected, sends barbed arrows into His heart. He weeps to see men choose their own misery.

These tears show us also how gladly He would save men if they would. He had given these people a day of blessed visitation. He had given them prophets and the writings of inspired men. He had given them the powerful ministry of John the Baptist. He had given them the melting influence of Incarnate Love. He felt for them; else why did He weep? He was anxious to save them; else why did His tears flow? Some might say, Why, then, did He not save them? The answer is, *They would not*; and because they would not, *He could not*. He could speak worlds into being; He could calm the raging storm; He could recall the dead to life; but He could not save those whose minds and hearts were set against their only Saviour. He might have transformed them by an edict of His power; but, forced against their will and choice, they would no longer have been moral beings. And as they were finally made up to disown and kill Him, He could not save them, and wept over the tragic end they had thus sealed upon themselves.

These tears of Jesus are *encouraging and consoling tears*. The sweet undertone that comes from them is, that He cares for us. They preach of His profound regard for our welfare, of His deep anxiety to have us improve by His merciful visitations, and of His unspeakable sorrow for those who reject His saving grace.

There be many hypocritical tears; but Christ's were not of that character. He is truth itself. They bespeak the genuine feeling of His heart. They tell of love that passeth knowledge, and on which we can safely trust. They assure us that there is ample provision for our eternal peace, if only we are willing to take and receive it. They prove to us that if we perish, it is a thing of great pain and sorrow to His heart, and that the fault of it is not in Him. They say to us that there is a beautiful and blessed life which He is infinitely desirous that we should have, which He freely offers, and from which nothing but our persistent and stubborn unbelief can ever separate us. These are comforting and consolatory truths. They are the very essence of the Gospel. And they are all the more clearly certified to us by these tears.

But they are *solemnly admonitory tears*. They tell of a day of gracious visitation, privilege, and opportunity; but likewise of a limit to that day. The substance of this tearful lament was, that these people had had a day which brought to them everything belonging to their peace; that they did not appreciate it; and that they now had

reached a point when there was no more hope for their city nor for their souls. How solemnly therefore do these tears admonish us to beware, lest we presume too far, or indulge our indifference and resistance to the calls and offers of mercy too long! There is a line over which grace will not follow the transgressor and beyond which there is no more salvation. This sore lament of Jesus tells us so, and that these Jews as a nation had crossed that line. There is no mark by which any one can tell just where that line is. Death indeed marks it; for there is no repentance in the grave nor pardon offered to the dead; but no one knows when he is to die; and the whole matter is often settled and unalterably fixed this side of death. There is such a thing as hardening one's self against light and truth, and a resistance of the Spirit, until there is no power of feeling left, and a condition of judicial blindness sets in which seals the sinner's doom. There is a sin unto death, when prayers no longer avail. There is an obstinacy against the truth, which lands one beyond all hope of pardon. God is very long-suffering and patient, not willing that any should perish; but there is a point at which He will no longer keep silence; and all who refuse and abuse His merciful compassion are in danger of bringing upon themselves irremediable condemnation. The time came when there was no more salvation for rebellious Jerusalem; and Christ's tears over the sad fact should move and admonish us not to risk such a fate.

Furthermore, these were *awfully foreboding tears*. Men of great minds do not weep for trifles; and the great and glorious Christ would not have been so deeply moved but for something transcendently sad and painful. Was it the temporal calamities that were to come upon His country that so affected Him? Then how much more reason for distress over the eternal perdition of these doomed people! What were the devastations wrought by the Roman armies compared with the wrath to come! There is something infinitely pitiable in the loss of a soul. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Nor is there anything that more touchingly tells the story than these tears of Jesus over these people who were about to shut the doors of hope and mercy against themselves.

Men may ridicule the doctrine of an eternal hell for the wicked and unbelieving; but what could thus move the feelings and draw the tears of the Son of God is not a thing to be laughed at or disposed of by a shrug of incredulity. Laying aside all idea of unquenchable fire, there is quite enough in these tears of our Lord to tell us that it is a deep, dark, and unspeakable calamity to be forever shut out from the divine favor. People in their folly, ignorance, and unbelief may make light of it; but the contemplation of it made the very Lord of glory weep.

And yet again, these tears of Jesus were *exemplary tears*. They evinced a tenderness of heart which we should cultivate,—a deep and loving

concern for the good and happiness of all creatures, especially for the salvation of souls. If Jesus wept over the dread consequences of abusing and rejecting the divine mercies, have we no cause for sorrow that we ourselves have so much to answer for in this respect?

— Dear friends, let us try to enter into the mind and spirit of our Saviour, that His mind and spirit may also live in us. Let us learn to regard the things that make for our peace as He regards them. Let us learn to grieve and lament over the misimprovement of our gracious privileges as He sorrows over those who fail to profit by His mercies. Let us learn to think and feel over the loss of the soul as He thinks and feels. And as we would have peace and gladden the Saviour's heart, let us not neglect the opportunities of our day lest its sun should go down and leave us unhelped in that blackness of darkness which moved the Son of God to tears.

The Preciousness of Life.

Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity.

For a living dog is better than a dead lion.—ECCLES. 9: 4.



FIND in this text a homely proverb illustrating the value and importance of life. In sundry places the author of this book speaks disparagingly of earthly life. He characterizes it, over and over, as empty, vexations, and vain,—even as vanity itself. But here he seems to take a somewhat deeper view, and finds, after all, that life is a thing of moment, and that even a dog living is better than a lion dead.

Nearly all creatures have an instinctive love of life; and most people would give up anything rather than life. Yet few estimate it as they should. Poets particularly have shown great aptness to speak lightly of it as a gay, flattering, fickle, transient thing,—a bursting bubble,—a meteor,—a dream. The Scriptures also speak of it as “but a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away.” And there *are* aspects of it which amply justify these presentations. No one can survey life without feeling that it is a scene of brief lights and deep shadows—a theatre of mingled smiles and tears, joys and sorrows,

roses and thorns,—which soon disgusts many, and in which no one can be long at home. But it has other aspects which render it exceedingly important and precious.

The fact that it is the gift and creation of God is reason enough for us to esteem and value it. We have in it a very masterpiece of divine power and goodness. Beasts, and birds, and flowers, and rocks, and waters, can attract and interest people, and how much more should we value living man, made but a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor, and given dominion over all creatures around him !

There are limitations, and drawbacks, and burdens in human life; but it sublimely demonstrates the existence, intelligence, and goodness of God. The form, mechanism, adaptations, beauty, and majesty of man's body alone could come only from some great Creator, with resources of wisdom and excellences to awaken our lasting adoration. But with this body is conjoined a rational spirit, that cognizes Deity and is related to Godhead as an inspiration and a child. People set great store on pictures which noted artists paint, and deem it a fortune to possess them; but what are they in comparison with the living images of the living God, which the infinite Master of all arts has produced in the endowment and adornment of these natures of ours—in the creation of a human life !

Important also is human life in view of what it can accomplish. Short and precarious as it is, we can hardly set limits to what may come of it, even

in this world. Think of the countless arts, crafts, trades, industries, pursuits, and professions which minister so bountifully to the necessities, conveniences, and comforts of man, the good of society, and the happiness of the world. Think of the advancement of learning, the achievements of science, and the varied gains of human thought, handiwork, and adventure, and what all this has contributed to the improvement and elevation of our race. Think of the play and progress of gifts, and talents, and activities, and energies that our human life affords, and the multitudinous and lofty results ever being turned out from this wonderful workshop. Think of the brilliant and beneficent triumphs of human genius in the mastery and utilization of the forces and powers of nature, in the yoking of the fiercest elements to our service, in the opening up of ready and instantaneous communication with the most distant sections of the world, in developments that make our times a wonder. And judging from the past, it is beyond our power to imagine what all may yet come out of this brief and swift-passing human life.

Still more important is human life in its connection with another world. The death of the body is not the end. There is an everlasting Beyond, to which this life is only the vestibule, and all the good or ill of that eternal Beyond depends on the manner in which we order ourselves while on earth. Indifferent as may be the appearances, or brief the years of our sojourn here, every step,

word, or thought echoes through eternity. As we conduct ourselves in this life we are filling up books of record to tell on our final destiny. Life here is a sowing for an eternal harvest, and the reaping is always according to the sowing. Our present being necessitates a further history on which the present must have a conditioning influence. The great Maker has created this stage of being, and the complex wheels of His providence have turned us out upon it, here to work out what we are to be hereafter, and we cannot make it otherwise. We cannot decline the momentous responsibility. It is the inevitable. And hence the unspeakable importance of this present life.

Life is valuable also for the opportunities it gives for usefulness. Every calling in life has open doors for doing good. "Many find nothing to do, because they do nothing to find;" for there is no condition in life without scope for moral activity and valuable service. Every one has some that look to him, lean on him, and take from him what influences their thinking and their lives. And we thus have opportunity for blessed things in our day and generation.

It is also in this life only that we can develop the virtues that most adorn human character. Heaven is no place for the cultivation of patience and self-control; or the practice of self-denial; or the exercise of forbearance, candor, and courage; for there are no trials there, no lusts to mortify, no enemies to fight, no ignorance and falsehood to combat, no poor and perishing to feed and

save. This world is the only field to grow these excellences.

This life also is the appointed time to secure the salvation of the soul. "Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation." And when we consider the value of the soul, and what all is involved in its eternal salvation,—the ruin from which it is rescued, and the glory to which it is exalted, by living union with Him who gave His precious blood for its redemption,—it would seem impossible to exaggerate the importance of the time allotted us to become partakers of the great salvation. Had life no other worth than this, it would still be a boon that calls for our everlasting thanksgiving.

And if perchance one finds himself outside the ark of safety, unprepared for death and heaven, his life is his period of hope and opportunity for a better lot. Even for the unworthiest and guiltiest this life furnishes room for repentance, for the retrieval of losses, and for the securement of eternal deliverance. While there is life there is hope,—a chance for happy change. No one living is shut out from the possibility of being saved, if in earnest to secure that goal. Only he who lets this life go by with mercy spurned and grace despised puts himself beyond hope.

And the importance and interest which centre in this present life, arise from the fact that we can never have another like it. Death effectually severs from everything now present, and ushers

into quite a different world. This life is one of probation; the next will be one of retribution. Having misused, abused, and squandered the one, there is no other of the sort on which to fall back to undo the mischief. There can be no inversion of the glass when once the sands of earthly life have run out. Though short, uncertain, and precarious as this life is, when it expires a thousand worlds cannot buy back a single moment of like privileges and opportunities. That line once crossed, the annals of our earthly life pass unchangeable into the archives of eternity.—O the momentousness of this frail and fleeting mortal life! Despite its days of grief and storm, and the gloom which gathers round its close, life is a blessing, an infinite blessing to him who views and uses it aright.

What, then, are the inferences to be drawn from all this?

First, if life is a thing of so much value, it is a sin wantonly to destroy it, or to expose it to injury and peril. "*Thou shalt not kill*" is the word of the Almighty thundered down the rocky side of the mount that flamed and trembled under His touch. Life is too precious a creation for Him to allow reckless liberties to be taken with it. According to His law, whosoever lifts a hand against a human life lifts it against God himself. And yet I find one hundred and seventy-nine thousand suicides reported for 1895, and a fearful increase of them for all the years since, besides murders without number.

Nor is it only the suicide and the murderer that stand chargeable with the sin of trifling with the precious gift of life. Wilfully to trample on the laws of health, to indulge intemperate excesses, recklessly to expose one's self to danger and disease, to stint the demands of nature to gain wealth, or to subject one's powers to the strains of wasting passions and killing toil is to make inroads upon life which good sense cannot approve and God will never justify. To damage, curtail, or destroy another man's life is to rob him of his dearest possession; nor is the guilt the less to inflict a like injury on one's self. It is wicked in either case; for it means destruction to a most valuable gift of God.

Again, if life is so important and precious, great is the debt of thankfulness we owe for its preservation and continuance. Many are the perils to which it is exposed,—perils in infancy, perils of disease, perils from ignorance and indiscretion, perils from the warring elements, perils from accidents, perils from the indwelling seeds of decay and death, perils from the very delicacy of the nature God has given us.

Our life contains a thousand springs,
And dies if one be gone.

And that we have thus far lived through all, with limbs, and senses and faculties preserved, and survived so many that were younger, stronger, and seeming to have a firmer hold on life than we, demands of us an amount of grateful returns that

should inflame and occupy us and all our powers for all the remainder of our days.

Furthermore, if life is a thing of so much worth and importance, we should be very guarded against impatient desire to have it ended. Elijah and Jonah prayed that they might die; but it was much to their discredit. And it would have been a sad thing for them, as well as for the Church, had God visited them as their bad temper prayed. It is the part of piety to wait all the days of our appointed time until our change come, meanwhile making the best we can of our lives, doing with our might all that our hands find to do. We are enlisted for life; and to withdraw before getting our proper discharge is to act the part of cowardly deserters. It is well to be ready to go at any time in any way our good Lord may choose; but willing to stay, and do, and suffer as He may appoint, thankful that He gives opportunity for us thus to add to the jewels of our crown.

And finally, if life is of such momentous consequence, no duty or obligation is more urgent or binding than to exert ourselves with all diligence to use it for its purposes. To trifle with it,—to handle it as a price in the hand of fools,—to waste and abuse it,—to neglect its precious privileges,—is to turn a transcendent blessing into a curse, trailing its ever deepening ills through everlasting ages.

Some pervert life to a wicked diabolism, sowing seeds of error, spreading snares for the heedless, laying stumbling blocks for the blind, taking ad-

vantage of the ignorance and passions of the weak, destroying the peace of families, and ruining themselves and all who come under their influence.

Some degrade life into a mere vulgar animalism, pursuing whatever flatters their senses, gratifies their fancies, and pleases their appetites, having no higher aim than to gratify and serve their earthly likings. Theirs is the Epicurean philosophy, which says, "Eat, drink, and be merry; for to-morrow we die."

Many prostitute life to unceasing toils for mere worldly ends. They labor day and night, rise early and sit up late, and tax themselves to the utmost, to win the prizes of earthly ambition, fortune, place, power, fame, and notoriety. Thousands are willing to do anything, spend any amount of time, energy, and means, incur any inconveniences, take any risks, make any sacrifices, for a title, a ribbon, a gain that cannot profit.

But, dear friends, this boon of life has been given us for higher and holier purposes. It was a great question of old time, "What is that good for the sons of men, which they should do all the days of their life?" but after reasoning out and experimenting in every direction for an answer, Solomon said, "the conclusion of the whole matter" is this: "Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." He who fails on this point, fails in the highest purpose of his being, and makes of His existence his worst calamity; for, in proportion as a man

ignores God and the claims of moral right, he mutilates his being, damages his manhood, mars his native dignity, and turns his immortality into an incurable wretchedness.

Dear friends, learn and profit by the lesson. Value and cherish your life, and see that ye devote it to its proper ends. Live for God, for truth, for usefulness on earth, for the awards of eternity. Anchor on the Rock of Ages. Let Jesus be your example and your guide ; and thus best live while you live. And beyond the hills which bound your present horizon ; beyond the stars that look down so lovingly amid these anxious night watches ; beyond these doubts and struggles, aches and ills ; when this world's bloom is gone, its pleasures past, its fortunes worthless, its chaplets withered, and all its joys are over ; there shall still remain for you a realm of light and beauty, victory and glory, where they that sow to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

The Fruitless Tree.

Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity.

Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this figtree, and find none : cut it down : why cumbereth it the ground ?—LUKE 13 ; 7.

WHILE the Saviour has given no explanation of the parable from which this text is taken, there can be no difficulty in understanding what it was meant to teach. The "certain man," stands for God himself. His vineyard is Christendom. This figtree is man.

The Scriptures frequently speak of men as trees. It is an apt comparison. A tree is a living growth. It has a life peculiarly its own. And it is capable of being very useful as well as ornamental. In these respects men are like trees.

But the text speaks of a particular kind of tree—a *figtree*—one of the most prized of domestic trees in oriental countries. Yet the figtree has something unfavorable attending it. The rabbis thought it the tree of which Eve and Adam ate and so introduced evil into the world. The Greeks used it as a symbol of calamity and guilt, and hung figleaves on the necks of criminals condemned to death. Even our own word *sycophant*,

signifying an obsequious and honeying deceiver, literally means *one who shows figs*. It is curious that a tree capable of so much good and blessing should have such associations. But in this also it represents man, who bears with him an unsavory history. He carries with him a tainted tradition. All humanity has about it the story of sin and condemnation.

This figtree was favorably situated. It was planted in a vineyard,—in a select, guarded, and cultivated spot, surrounded with every care and protection. So it was with the people of Israel. And so it is with those who have place in Christian lands. We have not been bred in the wilderness with savages and wild men, but in God's own vineyard,—in the very garden-spot of earth's best culture and greatest opportunities. Saxon blood,—the noblest and the ruling blood of our time,—flows in our veins. American homes,—the most favorable in the world,—are our homes. Protestant Christianity,—the truest and purest form of religion on earth,—is our birthright inheritance. Schools, churches, Bibles, preachers, printing presses, and all the facilities for moral, intellectual, social, and religious growth and prosperity, are everywhere about us, and ever active for our culture and improvement. We have had our places in the very heart and centre of the best of this world. From earliest infancy, light, truth, order, and gracious solicitude have surrounded us. And the good providence of God has never ceased to favor, water, and defend us, as the trees of His

own garden. We have grown up in His vineyard, and have never known anything else.

It was expected of this tree that it would bring forth fruit. It had a nature capable of yielding fruit. Its situation was favorable; and it had the time and culture to render it fruitful. Hence, its owner came year after year seeking fruit thereon. It was reasonable to expect to find it. God has a right to returns for the favors He has bestowed upon us. We have not been the recipients of so many gifts of grace and cares of providence for no purpose. God looks for us to be wiser, holier, and more conformed to truth and righteousness, than those who have none of our privileges. He expects us to profit by the Gospel, and to make just response to His merciful favors. He expects us to acknowledge His goodness, to confess His Name, and to consecrate ourselves, and all we have and are, to His service. The proprieties of life, and faithfulness in the various spheres we occupy, are in the line of Christian fruitfulness, if they spring from faith in the Lord; but that is not enough. Having given us His blessed Gospel, we are expected to embrace it, to confess it, to live by it, and to sustain and further it with our means and influence. Having place in His Church, we are expected to show fidelity and zeal in everything that pertains to its prosperity, and to honor our profession by works of faith and labors of love.

This figtree quite disappointed its owner. When he sought fruit on it, he found none. For three

successive years He came; but not a fig was there. So it was with the great body of the Jews; and so, alas, it is with many in our day. Though brought up in God's vineyard, and surrounded with all the means and opportunities of fruitfulness, many are barren trees. For years and years the Lord has been dealing out to them the benefits of His tender care; but no response have they ever made. Prayerless and careless have they remained under it all, doing nothing for God nor for their own souls. Again, and again, the Master has come seeking fruit, but finding none. Even in the professed Church, amid all the sacred services and lavish favors of divine goodness, many are as dead and fruitless as if they had never known the way of righteousness.

But exact account of this figtree was kept. Every visit was noted. And so God takes notice and account of every one that has place in His vineyard. Many take no account of themselves, and live along as if their indifference were nothing. Their golden opportunities, and their years of grace and privilege, they let pass without improvement. But there is One who has kept exact record of it all, and will some day demand account for the failure.

It was no pleasure to the owner of this vineyard that his figtree was so unfruitful. Nevertheless he was forbearing, willing to wait and give it full opportunity. But at length his patience gave out, and his word went forth, "*Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?*"

God is very merciful and slow to anger. He bears long with the neglectors and abusers of His grace. He is not quick to deal harshly with people, though so regardless of His favors and claims. But let them not suppose that He is pleased with them, or that their barrenness is no matter to Him. He will not always keep silence. The time will come for judgment upon every one that continues to disappoint His rightful expectations. As the fruitless tree is cut down and cast into the fire, so He has said He will deal with those who fail to profit by His mercies. There will come a sad end for all the barren trees in His vineyard.

Yet this tree was allowed to stand;—not because it deserved to stand,—not because its owner was not in earnest in condemning it,—not because there was any change of purpose respecting it,—but because a gracious and loving gardener interceded for it, and pleaded that it might be spared one season more, while he would ply it with further efforts to render it fruitful. In this gardener we recognize the blessed Christ, who ever pleads for poor barren souls. It is only because He lives, and pleads, and intercedes that any of us are here to-day. Had it not been for Him we would long since have been where mercy never comes. By His intercessions alone has doom been kept away.

For His sake we have been respited and our probation prolonged. On His account we are spared and still have chance for salvation, while

new mercies are added. Who of us can tell what thunderstrokes of death and judgment Jesus has warded off from us by His gracious intercessions? Who can tell what activities are at this hour going on before the throne in heaven by way of entreaty for barren souls? Oh, that fruitless plantings of the Lord did but see and understand how much they owe to that loving Jesus, whose word, and Church, and helpful ministrations they so belittle, neglect, and often despise!

But the respite in this case had its limit. It was only for a brief period, to see if betterment would come. And so in the case of every barren soul. With many it is only for a year. That time passed without improvement, the merciful intercessor Himself joins in, and says, "*Then cut it down.*" Even the Christ cannot defer judgment upon the negligent and unfruitful beyond a certain limit; and how near to that limit any one may be cannot be told. The axe is already laid at the root of many a tree, and any moment it may strike. This only do we know, that each recurring season, each day, each heart-throb brings the barren soul so much nearer the time when even the merciful Intercessor will say, "*Cut it down.*" The last gracious experiment will soon be over with some, and nothing but prompt and energetic change to a more dutiful form of life, now and at once, can save them. Presently one, and another, of whom we would least expect it, will have reached the boundary, their harvest past, their summer ended, and they

not saved. And who can measure the sorrow then to be felt?

Deep and painful is the anguish when a kind and loving earthly friend abandons us. Then what must it be to be forsaken by the blessed Jesus, and left unhelped and unpitied in the hands of almighty wrath! O the regrets and griefs that await the undutiful!

Dear friends, it is a great and blessed thing for us that Providence has given us place in His vineyard and surrounded us with privileges so exalted. But it is also a very serious thing. The greater the favors the more solemn the responsibilities. The higher the elevation the more terrible the fall. God expects and requires of the trees in His garden what He does not expect of those in the wilds. How, then, have we been meeting these just and reasonable expectations?


Alas, of how many has the good Lord been obliged to say, "*Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none!*" Will He allow such a state of things to continue. Consider this, O ye careless and faithless ones? and see to it that ye do not press His patience and forbearance too far.

"Wherefore the Holy Ghost saith, 'To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts,' but 'fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest any of you should seem to come short of it.'"

The Lost Chance.

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity.

The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.—
JER. 8 : 20.

 HIS sad lament the sorrowing prophet put into the mouths of the children of Israel, because they had sinned away their blessed opportunities and were now on the brink of the great captivity. But it is not necessary to confine ourselves to the original application of it. The people of Israel were not such sinners above all sinners that the same plight may not be realized in myriads of others in the course of the ages, and in many of our own day, or even among ourselves. Nor need we more than dwell a little on the wording and imagery of the text to find it abundantly suggestive of some of the most momentous practical truths demanding every one's very serious consideration.

I. I find it here suggested and clearly set before us that the great object to be attained in this life is the salvation of our souls. No one was ever created to be lost. From the time the Lord called

Adam to account for his disobedience, a system of provisions was instituted, and put in form to be transmitted to all his generations, by which to come to a knowledge of our wants, and of the way to the divine favor and eternal life. If that gracious light gradually faded out from the early world, it was amply restored when the race started on its new beginning in righteous Noah. And if the saving light of life was again diminished and lost to the nations born of him, it was no fault of the Good Lord, who made ample provision for all to have and retain the knowledge of Him, so as to glorify Him and enjoy His favor for ever. All this was still more abundantly true of ancient Israel, and especially of those to whom the Gospel has since been preached, and who now have the light and privileges of His completed revelations. At sundry times and in divers manners God spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, and in these last days hath He spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things. He has instituted His Church, given the Scriptures, appointed His ministers, and set up a complete economy of grace which has come to us and all the nations, so that we have only to give earnest heed to the things which are being preached to us continually, in order to find access into the holiest of all. Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live, a sublime and competent Saviour has been sent, who has gone through the whole work of satisfying for our

guilt, and now presents Himself in all His saving power and grace to every hearer of the Gospel, saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Is it now asked, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" His own clear and assuring answer is, "*This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.*" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." And all the ministers of the Gospel in all the world are now commissioned and sent, as Christ's ambassadors, to carry His Word of reconciliation to all nations, kindred, people, and tongues, and in His stead to beseech every one to be reconciled to God, and take the redemption purchased by this Saviour's blood.

From all this it is clear and certain that God desires our salvation, and that this is now the great object for which He is ever dealing with us in this world, and the supreme thing that our lives are given us to attain. Missing this we miss the goal of our existence.

II. I find it here suggested and clearly set before us, that particular seasons and opportunities are given us for securing our salvation. We cannot grow and gather our bread in winter. We must have the warm and genial summer time to give us harvests and appropriate seasons for gathering them. The years of grace likewise have their seasons,—their summer and harvest

time,—in which to secure and appropriate the bread of life.

The happiest and most precious summer time of grace is the growing and susceptible season of youth. The Scriptures are everywhere eloquent in their observations upon the great advantages of early piety, and the earnest beginning of Christian life while the heart is yet tender and unengrossed with the cares and worries of later years. Impressions received when we are young strike the deepest and last the longest. When almost everything else is forgotten the old man still recollects the lessons of his youth, and what his pious mother taught him when he was a child. The little prayers he learned to say while kneeling at her knee are those which are most present to him in his declining days, and serve him best as he comes to pass away from earth. Amid all the turmoil, and bustle, and strife through which he has passed, and by which so much that once interested him has been brushed away to oblivion, the things which he learned, and felt, and was taught to cherish in his early days still retain their place and brightness to the last. At no other period is the heart so open, so near heaven, so capable of receiving sacred truth, so intense in the hold which it takes upon right instruction, so susceptible of being impressed with what is to shape life to the proper standard. The pursuits, anxieties, disappointments, and pressing cares of maturer life soon tread down the softer sensibilities, harden the nature, and give a set to the soul

which renders it difficult to move it with anything but the calls and interests of this present world. As youth's bright season passes away and the hard struggles and competitions of business come upon us, the probabilities are much diminished of ever making the necessary revolution for a new start, if we have never before learned to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. People who have neglected their souls until middle life, are far less likely ever to feel again as they would have felt, or to succeed as well as they would have succeeded, if they had been careful to remember their Creator in the days of their youth. Each year of neglect and continuance in unconcern detracts from the likelihood of ever embracing that Gospel on which every one's salvation hangs. Youth and early life are therefore God's special summer time for the fashioning of the soul to His will, and of imparting to it that heavenward impulse by which to secure a happy destiny.

There also comes to every one, at one time or another, a season of solemn retrospect and thoughtful review, when we are forced to consider what and where we are, what we are here for, and how we have been disposing of ourselves and our opportunities;—times when we are in a measure retired from the beaten ways and common current of things,—times when by choice or otherwise we turn aside a little to the byways, nooks, and sequestered spots to meditate, and think, and ponder,—times when we get away

somewhat from our common selves to contemplate and inquire about life, and what we are living for, and how it is likely to be with us when we have done with earth. These are significant and important times,—moments which are mothers to the most decisive impulses, yea, mothers to our eternities. They furnish the pivot-moments on which our destiny turns, and on which the soul vibrates to take its direction for this world and the next. They are the times that fashion and decide the under-strata of our whole career, and lay the foundations of all that is to come of our existence. They are the brooding times which shape our lives and determine the character of our immortality. They come sometimes in connection with great disappointments, startling events of Providence, sore bereavements, bitter losses, or turns of fortune which bring our whole course of life to a halt. This is a very unsettled and unstable world, and great and unexpected events and changes are ever occurring. With all our care irresistible waves break in and turn all our plans and calculations upside down, sweeping away upon their boisterous surges all that was fair, beautiful, hallowed and promising ; cutting the very ground from beneath our feet, desolating all our proud thoughts, and laying all our lofty imaginings in ruins. The gourd which has been sheltering our heads is cut by some unexpected worm. The tree in whose beautiful shadow we have so confidently reposed is withered down to its roots. The objects on

which the tendrils of the heart were twining themselves give way and disappear, and our souls in the agony of their bereavement and desolation are compelled to cast about in other directions, and to bethink them for quite other orders of things. The natural heart may be disposed to view such times as only wintry and disastrous; but they are really God's summer times for the bringing of us to thoughtfulness and salvation. It is then that we are cut loose from the world that has been dragging us with it, and that the hard soil is softened and torn up for the reception of the good seed which God would sow in it for our eternal good. It is then that the majesty and claims of neglected Heaven come very near and press upon us with solemn force. God is then speaking to us with special urgency and power. And next to the susceptible season of youth, these times are the most favorable seasons for the growing and gathering of the blessed harvest of salvation. If they are left to go by unimproved, or only madden the soul against itself or against the Lord who rules in all these things, the hope of ever being saved is put all the further away, and the insensibility is less likely than ever to be overcome. If such seasons come and pass, and the world again comes back, and life settles once more into its old channels, and no salutary change is wrought in our aims and character, the chances are a thousand to one that so it will continue to the end, and salvation be forever lost.

There also come seasons of special visitations

of grace, times of much religious interest in the community, times when a particular seriousness gathers over people's minds, and thoughts of God, judgment, and eternity insinuate themselves even into the most hardened and unwilling. Circles of friends, families, or churches are sometimes visited with a common sobering of mind, and thinking on serious things, and an unusual concern about the way they have been living and doing. One and another is impressed and moved to a thorough change, which makes others thoughtful and serious. Individuals certainly come upon such times. In one way or another God's voice comes to them, so that their gayities pall, and their souls become restless over their long indifference, and their thoughts go forward to the setting of summer suns, and the coming of autumn tints, and the dropping of autumn leaves, and the closing up of life. Eternity rises to their view as a solemn reality, and there comes a knocking at the heart, a quickening of the pulse, and a deep stir in the soul as to how it will be with them when death overtakes them, and the gravestone marks the place where the earthly journey ended. And then it is that "the kingdom of God is come nigh," and the Holy Ghost is moving about the spirit to win it to the ways of righteousness and the better world. These also are the precious breezes of God's summer time, which no one can afford to despise.

And so there are other special days and seasons, such as birthdays, anniversaries of affecting deaths

or events in life, the closing of the year, the beginning of a new section of time. Such seasons have a special power to impress and stir up wholesome thoughtfulness over past failures and neglects, and to beget new resolves that touch on the wants and eternal interests of the soul. Even days of festival and rejoicing, times of family gatherings, thanksgiving days, and Christmas times, when children and children's children assemble in the old home, and everything is full of cheer and merriment, may serve as occasions to beget very serious thinking. In the midst of the social joy and happiness, while the eyes are feasting with the pleasant scene, there comes with the gladness the saddening undertone that this picture must some day be reversed; that the time will come when those heads so full of bright thoughts will toss upon the fevered pillow, those little hearts beating with so many glad emotions grow still and cold, and the home that rings so joyously with merry laughter echo the sighs and lamentations of them that weep over lost ones never more to return;—when these patriarchs of the circle shall be gone, and other feet tread these patrimonial halls, and young and old lie in silence beneath the sod. All these and such like may be fitly called the summer time of sacred impression and holy impulse to move the soul and bring it into saving harmony with God.

The summer time of grace is not necessarily confined to such seasons. In a wider and more general sense that summer time is life, and takes

in the whole period of our stay on earth. But when we deduct the years of unconscious infancy, and the time we necessarily spend in unconscious sleep, and the times when we are thoughtlessly carried along with the drift of things about us, and the times when we are absorbed and taken up with the pursuits and pleasures of life, and the years already gone, and the uncertain years of the future which may never come, our summer time for working the works of God and gathering our harvest for eternity is after all very limited, and the times I have named make up almost the entire sum. Neglecting these we neglect all our main chances, and probability rises to almost certainty that we never shall see salvation. This harvest past, and this summer ended, without recovery from listlessness and indifference to heavenly things, there is poor chance that matters will ever be any better with us.

III. Furthermore, I find it here suggested and distinctly set before us that the period of grace must one day come to an absolute termination. The harvest cannot last all the year. Long and genial as the summer may be, it must end. And it always ends sooner than we calculate. How long has it been since June set in, and people in general were busy with their plans how to order themselves and their vacations for the summer? But June was quickly gone, and July hasted past, and August suns soon rose and set no more, and September was here almost before we thought;

and presently the sun crossed the line, and nature began to show the sear and yellow leaf. And now the bare branches and the chill winds tell of the ending year. A true picture this of the way it is with the season of grace and salvation. It comes upon us as by stealth, before we are half prepared for it. We are apt to think, "Oh, life is long,—it is time enough,—there will be plenty of opportunity." But presently the June of youth is past, and the main harvest time is over. Then come the languid days of midsummer, when the burdens and oppressions of life hang heavy upon us. And then come the busy times of approaching autumn; and the summer limit is reached before we have had time to consider. Presently the last note is sung; the last act of the drama is performed; the clock of eternity strikes; the curtain falls; the last pulse trembles in the heart; the summer is ended, the harvest past, and all the opportunities of this world are gone forever!

Who will dispute the facts as I state them? In whose experience and observation do they not find an echo?

But even apart from the termination of life, which may occur at any time in any case, the summer time of spiritual blessing and opportunity may come to a speedy close. God will not always wait on those who only waste their time and abuse His long suffering. His offers persistently unheeded are ever liable to be withdrawn and taken back. It was a fearful sentence pronounced upon the old world, when God said, "My Spirit shall

not always strive with man," and on the heels of mercy neglected and misimproved came summary and awful judgment. It was a fearful message sent to the rebellious and unfaithful Jews: "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee." And it is one of the settled principles of the divine government: "He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy." Every instance in which the soul deliberately puts from it the clear and evident calls of God and stifles conviction for the following of its own self-chosen ways is a step toward that fatal line at which the divine word says, "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone." And when once the Holy Spirit is thus grieved away from the soul the ministries of grace cease from their effect. Man stands then as a dead tree upon which the sun rises and sets, and the seasons come and go, but there is no more living response to the heavenly beams. Then already, even in this present life: "The harvest is past, the summer ended, and the soul is not saved."

But barring all such calamity, the time is coming, and may be near at hand, when our whole history on earth will reach a perpetual end. When we begin to live we also begin to die. We are all like travellers passing through a land for the last time; every step leaves so much behind never to be seen again, and brings us so much closer to the moment when the whole territory will recede from us for ever. And how

will it then be with the frivolous and unthoughtful who have spent their precious youth pursuing the butterflies of worldly pleasure, and their riper years in scrambles and strifes for the honors, riches, and emoluments of earth, and held at bay through all their course all claims of God and serious religion! What will it avail for any one to say, "I have been reared in a pious home; I have brought up my family in respectability and comfort; I have labored hard and diligently to secure an honorable living; I have conducted an honest business; I have secured a competency for those dependent on me; I have received the applause, respect, and esteem of all that knew me; I have never blotted my record with base crimes and wicked habits; I have much goods lawfully acquired, and have given an example to the world of probity and good citizenship;" if with all it must be added, "but I have neglected God and my soul; I have favored religion, but never made it my own; I have supported the Church, but always put off becoming a faithful member of it myself; and now I must die as I lived, the harvest past, the summer ended, and I not saved!

IV. And yet again, I find it here suggested and distinctly set before us, that if ever we are saved at all we must faithfully and promptly embrace and improve the seasons of grace which God in mercy sends us. If any of you are yet in the morning of life, see to it that you do not let it pass without earnestly seeking the kingdom of

God and His righteousness. It is of all times God's own chosen time for coming under the conditions for a good and pious life. Letting this go by unimproved, you let go the very best chance you can ever have, and it may be your only chance. And if that precious season has already gone without making you a child of God, by all the store you set on a blessed eternity do not neglect your present opportunities. Now while you have health and reason,—now while you hear the whisperings of the Spirit urging you not to neglect so great salvation,—now while you yet can feel the motives and influences given to bring you into the fold of Christ,—now that the evil day has not yet overtaken you, nor the years when you will have gone too far to retrace your steps,—now while the doors of mercy stand open to you, and you feel almost persuaded to enter,—let nothing come in to keep you back, lest the harvest pass, the summer end, and you be left without part or portion with the saved.

In everything there is the utmost importance attaching to the favorable moment.

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.—
On such a full sea are we now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

And so there are crises in our lives,—moments pregnant with vast results,—which, promptly

seized, become the turning-points of everlasting triumph, but which, if left to pass, bring irremediable failure. Present opportunities neglected can never return. Once lost, they are gone for ever. Others may come, but never can fully repair all the disadvantages of having let the first go unimproved. The great matter is to seize the favorable moment as it comes, and work and gather when the harvest and the summer are upon us, lest we miss our chance, and find, with all our good intentions, that we are too late, too late. If ready to meet religious duty now, it may still not be altogether too late. But be assured that a course of indifference and procrastination cannot go on without limit. Some of these passing days the sun of mercy will have crossed the line, the clock have struck the hour of harvest past, the summer ended. And what if you should then be found "*not saved*," all your opportunities closed, the ship of your salvation gone, and nothing left but the agonizing lament—"Too late! Too late"?

Zeal for God.

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity.

And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.—2
KINGS 10: 16.



ZEAL is a very important thing in human life. It is to man what fire is to a steam engine. However perfect the machinery, it is but little worth without heat to drive it into action. Zeal is heat, ardor, earnestness, energy,—the passion which we throw into what we undertake. A man without zeal is a drone, a clog, a burden, a blot. He wins no applause; he excites no pity; he accomplishes no good. If he has talents they are buried, and not always in a napkin. He may count in the census, but he is a mere cipher of existence. The world scarcely knows that he is in it, except for what he consumes; and were he to die to-morrow, it would be no worse off from his absence.

The sentence which fell upon man at the beginning requires the eating of our bread in the sweat of our brows; and, without energy in business and a vigorous and persevering putting of our hands to do with our might what we find to do, life must be a failure. No work, no bread;

no zeal, no manly success. This is the law of things in this present world.

And of all things in which to be zealous, zeal in our religion,—“zeal for the Lord,”—needs to be vigorous and strong. Were it possible to be lukewarm in everything else and not suffer, to be lukewarm in this admits of no excuse, and has upon it the disgust and condemnation of God. Jesus has said from heaven: “I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.” Above all things it is required of us to “be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” All the examples which the Scriptures most commend are such as Phineas, and David, and Elijah, and Josiah, and Hezekiah, and Apollos, and Paul, and Epaphras, who were distinguished in nothing more than in the intense fervor shown for God, His worship, and His truth. Jesus has left an example for all believers to follow; and in prophecy as in its fulfillment He is represented as the one who could say, “The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up.” And very hard it is to see how any one can be a right man, much less a right Christian, without close imitation of those who showed themselves “very zealous for the Lord of hosts.”

But zeal of itself is an imperfect virtue. Even when contemplating the true God and the true service of God it may go very far astray. It may exist in flaming warmth, and exert itself with tremendous power, and still not make the man

in whom it burns a true and accepted servant of the Lord. It needs the guidance of wisdom and the regulation of other principles. Paul had as much zeal while a Pharisee as he had after he became a Christian; but it made of him a bloody monster in the one case, and a very messenger of life and salvation in the other. The Jews of his time had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. And so it has been in very many instances. Tyrants and popes, Councils and Inquisitions, zealots and bigots, have murdered millions on millions of people better than themselves, and made their history a shame and scandal in the earth. No one can be a true servant of God *without* zeal; but zeal alone can never make a man a saint. There must be something to qualify and direct it, or it becomes a blasting ruin and disgrace.

Nor need we go further than the man who spoke the text, to see wherein zeal, even with a good and holy cause, may be so tainted and intermixed with other qualities as to make its possessor a monster and a reprobate.

Jehu was sacredly called and anointed to be the King of Israel in place of the infamous and idolatrous seed of Ahab and Jezebel, all of whom he was divinely commissioned to smite and destroy. He undertook the work with daring energy, and this he called his "zeal for the Lord," which he invited Jehonadab to come with him to see. It was right that he should follow the commands God had given him. It was right that he

should bring all his power to bear against idols and idolatry. It was right that he should set himself to recover his country from the base apostasy which Jezebel and Ahab had induced. And so far his zeal was in accord with the revealed will of heaven and in the path of duty. But it was after all a zeal which brought little credit or good to himself, and eventually called down divine judgment on his house.

Note, then, the particulars in which this man's zeal was faulty and thus learn to direct our own aright.

Jehu's zeal was tainted with a ferocious cruelty. It was his business, as the administrator of the laws of Israel, to make an end of that infamous woman Jezebel, whose impieties and crimes bereft her of every right to life and every plea of compassion ; but it was not his business to enact toward her the wanton barbarity of the savage, to have her cast unwarned from the window of her palace, to trample her body under the feet of his horses, to drive his chariot over her mangled frame in the public streets, and to let her bones lie in the highway for the dogs to crunch. It was his business to execute Jehoram, who had forfeited all title to allegiance ; but it was not his business to encounter the doomed and wounded monarch with such harsh and cruel taunts, to shoot him down like a dog, and to cast him out unburied where Naboth's blood was spilled. It was his business to put out of the way the seventy princely scions of Ahab's house ; but it was not

his business to do it with such cruel treachery, to have their heads carried in baskets from Samaria to Jezreel, and to stack them in heaps by the city gates as a public show. And it was also his business to bring down the power of Baal's priests and worshippers; but it was not his business to deceive them with such atrocious hypocrisy to such a horrible slaughter.

Thus Jehu's "zeal for the Lord" was savagely ferocious. It lacked charity, and hence was not a genuine zeal for God. True zeal, like the heavenly wisdom of which it is born, "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." It is not indeed a mawkish sentimentalism, which cannot bear to give pain or punish the guilty. There must be vigorous firmness to discharge every duty, no matter how painful. What God commands, it must have the nerve to do without fear or favor. But it must likewise be tempered with reason and humanity. We cannot acceptably serve God while we outrage all considerations of justice, whether in word or deed. Needless severity and harshness, even to the unworthiest and guiltiest, is wrong, and betrays a spirit which is not of God. Right zeal cannot compromise with untruth or unrighteousness. It belongs to its nature to hate, abhor, and fight sin in all its forms; but not so as to play the savage or the brute toward the sinner. A man is still a fellow man, however far he may be out of the way; and the obligations of a common creat-

urehood hold with reference to his person, however necessitated by law and righteousness to condemn and punish his crime.

Jehu's zeal was further marred by a vain-glorious, proud, and ostentatious spirit. A true and vigorous zeal certainly involves publicity. A man cannot be an earnest, faithful, and enterprising servant of God without putting himself before the eyes of others. Though he may not court observation or applause, he cannot retire from notice, and do all his work in secret. Nor could Jehu fulfill the duties imposed upon him without very marked public demonstrations. But his address to Jehonadab showed far more arrogance and swelling pride than genuine piety. He did not say, Come, counsel with me, that I may make no mistakes in these peculiar duties ; or, Come, help me carry through my solemn and painful commission with due humility, gratitude, and godly fear; but he set himself up as the grand hero, and said, Come, behold me, admire me, witness the grand things that I am doing, and see if the like of me was ever in Israel. Here was vanity, conceit, and a vaunting self-consequence and self-assertion, wholly out of place in a true man of God.

True religious zeal does not thus sound a trumpet before it. It vaunteth not itself. Neither does it depend on human admiration and praise to perpetuate its efforts. It does not work to be seen of men, and is not eager for earthly panegyrics. It lives to God rather than to men, and is

ever modest in what it claims for itself, knowing that at best it is but an unworthy servant.

There were no classes of people whom the Saviour condemned with greater severity than those religionists of His time who sought the chief seats in public assemblies, the uppermost rooms at feasts, and thanked God that they had not the faults and weaknesses of other men. And so there be many still who are never to be seen except on great occasions, who will not serve if they cannot lead, who must be petted, and pampered, and pleased, and admired, or their activity and devotion all goes from them, and who seem to think that everything is going to rack and ruin unless they are at the helm. But all such zeal is Pharisaism, born of the vanity and depravity of man, and not of the Spirit of God. And all who take to religion and its activities for show and self-importance, and use the plea of "zeal for the Lord" to win admiration, favor, or public notoriety for themselves, are mere Jehus, corrupt in mind and destitute of the living power of the truth.

And a yet further defect in Jehu's zeal was its lack of moral principle and honest consistency. Good ends can never justify wicked means. No earnestness of pious endeavor can ever supersede the laws of eternal morality. A man cannot lie, and deceive, and play the foul trickster, even for the success of a good cause or the glory of God, without compromising his virtue and his saintship. Jesuitism is devilism, no matter how it

may varnish or disguise itself. It is specially forbidden to do evil that good may come. But this is just what tainted the sudden zeal of Jehu. He adopted the most perfidious deceit, falsehood, and hypocrisy to destroy the worshippers of Baal ; and when his treacherous butchery of them was over his devotion to the true worship was after all so weak, suspicious, and self-seeking that he refused to make common cause with it as established at Jerusalem, and set up "the golden calves of Bethel and Dan," saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel!"

The zeal that would honor God, and that God honors, must in all things obey God. It cannot transgress one commandment under plea of devotion to another. It cannot serve righteousness by adventuring into wickedness. A heart that can deceitfully proclaim the glory of Baal, even though meant for Baal's destruction, is too rotten to be trusted for Jehovah, and will just as soon deify golden calves when that suits its purposes. If we would serve God, we must serve Him honestly, truthfully, consistently. It will not do to be zealous to pull motes out of the eyes of others, while beams are sticking in our own ; or to be strict in tything mint, anise, and cummin, while the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith, are trampled under foot. Of what use can it be to our estate with God, outwardly to appear righteous unto men, while inwardly full of hypocrisy and iniquity? What credit is it to strain to put down one evil while exemplifying

another? What virtue is there in fighting for a cause which we are ready to compromise on the first temptation? An old bishop has said, "No zeal is right which is not charitable;" and we may add with equal point, No zeal is right which is not thoroughly *moral*. I once knew a man who was never so earnest a Christian as when he was a little drunk; but such a zeal is a thing of disgust both to God and man.

True zeal is the outbirth of a pure and holy spirit. It is not a romantic sentiment that glows only while the glamour lasts. It is not an affection, put on from without, and having no counterpart in the qualities of the soul. It is not a mere sympathetic furore, caught from others, as the coward also rushes into battle, and as the multitude runs without knowing why. It is not a mere galvanism of the spirits, artificially wrought up for some special emergency, which subsides or changes when the spurt is over. It is a living principle, grounded in the heart, fed and sustained by conviction and love of right, which lives to the truth and eye of God, and is a vital part of the inmost character of the man, in sunshine and in shade. It is a live coal from the heavenly altar, which cleanses and purges while it animates the soul, and makes it warm and ready to answer to every call of God, "*Here am I; send me.*" It is not the spirit of party, the impulse of self, the mere influence of association, the obstinacy of a favorite scheme, the endurance of a proud nature, the carnal thirst for applause,

the greed for personal aggrandizement; but that spirit of faith which led Moses to choose suffering with the people of God rather than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt. It is true religion made living and potent in the soul, which consecrates the whole man, with all his powers and for all his days, to the humble, patient, unswerving, and unabridged devotion to God and duty, trusting in Him whose is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.

And this, dear friends, is what I am here to inculcate. A word from the eternal throne has come forth to every one of us. It tells of a God to be honored, a cause to be served, wrongs to be righted, and great things to be achieved; and that we are here for the purpose. There is no room for doubt as to the part meant for us to take. What response, then, have we given to the heavenly message? How have we been answering to the word and anointing of Jehovah? Many live and act as if there were no God, no prophets by Him commissioned, no word from heaven for them to obey. But life was not given for such inanition.

Many have had the anointing of holy Baptism, consecrating them to a life of faith and activity for God, who slumber in sin, and live along in dead inertia toward their sacred calling, as if they had no souls to do for, no Christ to serve, no work for Him, no account to render at the last. "Woe

to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of Me; and that cover with a covering, but not of My Spirit!" And even of those who have sworn unto the Lord, and laid their vows upon His altar, how many are as indifferent as if the cause of God and righteousness were scarcely to be distinguished from the gay and idolatrous world? If ever they were earnest and ardent in their profession, they have left their first love. Their ardor has lost its flame. Their zeal is dead. Some are vain enough to think themselves rich, and increased with goods, and needing nothing; and know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Alas, what fresh quickening from on high do all such people need! Nay, what spiritual revival do we all need, to make us such Christians as we ought to be!

The great thing required for the Church of our times, both in its leaders and in its people, is a new baptism of fire, to kindle and warm them into a pure and living *zeal for God*, as against the idolatries, apostacies, shams, and lies which everywhere infest society, and are fast dragging this present world to its destruction. And the way to get it is, for each one individually to turn unto the Lord his God with vigorous energy and devotion, to repent out of all existing deadness, and to join the life of a Christian with the name. What our hands find to do, we must do. And with each one ready and thirsting to do the will of God, and to serve Him with an undivided

heart, there will be no lack of genuine zeal for the Lord of hosts. God help us to be true and faithful to our calling, that we may be His in the great day.

Work for the good that is nighest ;
 Dream not of greatness afar ;
 That glory is ever the highest
 Which shines upon men as they are.

Work, though the world would defeat you ;
 Heed not its slander nor scorn ;
 Nor weary till angels shall greet you
 With smiles through the gates of the morn.

Offer thy life on the altar ;
 In the high purpose be strong ;
 And if the tired spirit should falter,
 Then sweeten thy labor with song.

The Glorious Beyond.

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Trinity.

And He said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power.—MARK 9 : 1.



THE years come and go. This is the last Sunday in the annual round of our Church seasons. After to-day the whole Church year will be numbered with the past. Everything in nature around us,—the faded and falling leaves, the shortening days, and the waning of the sun's power,—also reminds us of an approaching termination of our sojourn on earth.

It is fitting, therefore, that we should cast our thoughts forward to what is beyond, and inquire about what is to come after we have done with this present world. In this the text, and that to which it specially refers, can serve us well, and help to throw much blessed light upon what to many is very dark and dim.

Jesus here speaks of seeing "the Kingdom of God come with power." The same is spoken of in Matthew as seeing "the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom." And in Luke the same is described as seeing "the Kingdom of God."

This Kingdom has different stages: the Kingdom in embryo, and the Kingdom finally complete,—the Kingdom in Spirit as it now exists, and the Kingdom in full manifestation as it is to be hereafter,—or what is otherwise called the Kingdom of grace, and the Kingdom of glory. It is of the latter, or the Kingdom as hereafter revealed, when the Lord Jesus will come again, that is here spoken of. The coming of the Kingdom “*with power*,” and the coming of “*the Son of Man in His Kingdom*,” in visible manifestation, as here phrased, sufficiently prove that the reference is to the Kingdom as it is to be when Christ shall come the second time.

Now three of the Evangelists tell us that the Saviour solemnly announced to His disciples, shortly before His Passion, that some of them should not taste of death till they had seen this kingdom. How then, when and where did they see it? as the great day had not come in their lifetime. The answer to this question is given in the record of what occurred soon after this saying of the Saviour. And there we read:—“After six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart to pray. And as He prayed the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light, so as no fuller could white them; and there appeared unto them Moses and Elias in glory, talking with Jesus, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jeru-

saalem; and Peter, and they that were with Him, saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him."

True, this was not the Kingdom in its final consummation; but it was a living picture and exhibit of it, in which these men saw the Son of man coming in His kingdom, and from which we may see the chief features of that kingdom in its ultimate completion. For whatever else the scene of the Saviour's Transfiguration may have been intended to subserve, it was a picture, earnest, and showing of the Kingdom as it will be when complete. The disciples were to "*see* the Son of man coming in His kingdom" before they died, and we search through their history in vain for anything answering to the description, save this scene of the Transfiguration. Peter also distinctly identifies this scene as an exhibit of "the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." And all the features and surroundings of the case assure us that it was meant to be a pictorial illustration of the great redemption work in its final outcome.

What, then, may we learn from it touching the estate and condition of things when our Saviour comes again, as He has foretold?

It shows the exalted character of the kingdom as far above the common world. The exhibit was on "a high mountain," and in Scripture, as in nature, mountains connect with heaven and the divine. "All that expands the spirit, yet appals, gathers round their summits." They

tower above the smoke and stir of this lower world, and seem to be joined with, as they image the eternal Almightyness. And thus lofty, heavenly, glorious, and joined to eternity is the kingdom of Christ when once it comes to its full revelation. For "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills."

This scene also shows us Jesus in His proper excellency. He was still a man, as He always will be; but a transfigured, glorified, *metamorphosed* man,—a man arrayed in the glory of Divinity. "His face did shine as the sun." His very garments glowed with burning brightness. And so intense and transcendent was the splendor that permeated and enveloped Him that the Evangelists seem at a loss for words and images to describe it. They pile together the most expressive terms and figures, and then seem to feel as if they had only half told the sublime reality. And so it is that He is said to appear in the great consummation. He is then to come in His glory. The promise is that we shall then "see the King in His beauty;" and here was the exhibit and illustration of that beauty and glory with which "He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired of all them that believe."

The same also shows us the reality of another life for those who believe in Him. We look into the cold, damp, and dreary grave, and hear the sad consignment of "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust," and in trembling and

doubtful wonderment we ask, "If a man die, shall he live again?" But this scene of the Transfiguration answers the question with positive demonstration. Men long departed from this world were there. Moses, the servant of God, who had *died* in Moab's mountain more than one thousand years before, was there. Ages had passed since God laid his body to rest; yet here he was, living and speaking. Elijah had been caught away from earth for more than eight hundred years; yet here he was, in living companionship with Moses and Christ, and seen and heard by the three disciples who witnessed the scene. To pass away from this life, then, is not sinkage into oblivion or nothingness. The departed still have place and life, though the places that once knew them know them no more.

And the same tells of the estate and condition of God's departed servants when once the Kingdom is complete. Paul gives it as the Lord's own word: that when He shall come with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, "the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we [believers] which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we be ever with the Lord." And here is the living illustration of it. Here is Moses, representing the saints who have died, and Elijah representing those of them who never die at all; both of them "in glory," both of them with Christ in near and familiar converse, not only beholding, but sharing His glory.

What may be between death and the resurrection we are not told ; but the word is that when our Saviour comes in His kingdom He will "change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body ;" and here was the exhibit of the fact accomplished. These ancient saints were in the same glory and heavenliness of the transfigured Jesus. David looked forward to a time when he would awake in Jehovah's likeness ; and here is the showing of what he anticipated.

We sometimes wonder whether the saints in glory have any knowledge of or interest in what is going on in this world ; and on that also this Transfiguration scene throws some rays of light. Moses and Elijah certainly knew about Christ's mission and work in the world, and the sort of termination it was to have ; for this was the one great subject of their conversation, as heard by the disciples. The record is, that they "spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." And if these men knew of Christ's doings, and what was about to happen to Him, they must have been in condition to know more of what was going on in the world. Why, then, should we think that saints in glory have lost all recollections or knowledge of earthly affairs, and all interest in what most enlisted them while here ?

The question is sometimes asked, Shall we know each other in heaven ? This, too, the scene of the Transfiguration would seem to answer. Moses and Elijah knew Christ and must have

known each other, and were known and recognized by Peter, James, and John. And if those who had never seen nor known each other in this world could so readily be identified, shall we not be able to recognize those whom we have seen, and known, and loved?

People generally have very crude notions as to what is to become of the earth when Christ comes. Some think it will be utterly annihilated, stricken out of existence, or turned into some tenantless and indescribable desolation. But this showing of the Kingdom tells a very different story. The earth with its mountains and valleys still was there, though with Christ and His glorified ones over and above it. And there were the representatives of its population in the flesh, in the persons of Peter, James, and John. Their place was high above the common world. They were chosen men, set apart and consecrated unto the Lord. Christ and the saints in glory were in view when they were rightly awake, and the manifestations and testimonies to them from the heavenly orders were full of blessedness. And so there will be a redeemed and sanctified race upon the earth after Christ comes in His Kingdom. The earth, like all the ordinances of heaven, is made to abide for ever. The curse that is now upon it for man's sin will be lifted off; but it will not be denuded of population. It was made to be inhabited, and its inhabitants then will be a redeemed humanity, as here represented. It will not be the home of the elect and glorified; for they shall be like

the angels, and in the same sort of supernal life in which Jesus is ; but it will be the home of righteousness, and of a redeemed race, such as would have been if Adam had never sinned.

The showing is that the Kingdom complete will embrace several distinct classes. First, the Head of all will be the glorious Christ. Second, those glorified saints who died in faith and were brought forth again in the resurrection of the just. Third, those who never died at all, but were suddenly changed, transported, and made the glorified companions and associates of the children of the resurrection. These are the kings, priests, and administrators under Christ, in dealing with and ruling over the race then still dwelling in the flesh, which constitute a fourth class. And thus shall be realized that "restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

And yet another showing in this Transfiguration scene was, the intense emphasis it gives to the crucifixion of Christ as the centre of the whole redemption work. Moses and Elijah in glory on that mountain were in devout conversation with the Saviour ; and that conversation was on one specific theme. It was not the glory of the occasion ; nor the glory He was to resume with the Father after His work on earth was done ; nor yet the glory of His Kingdom in its final consummation. The record says, 'They talked with Him, and "spake of *His decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.*"' These men were

among the greatest of the ancient worthies, and there were myriads of momentous subjects that might have engaged their attention ; but from all other topics in the universe they turned to this one theme, and talked of it alone ; namely, *the death of Jesus at Jerusalem*. Calvary—the Cross—the self-sacrifice of the eternal Son of God for man's redemption—this engrossed the whole time and the whole attention of the sublime conference. And what an unspeakable significance does this assign to that death scene ! The Kingdom itself, its very existence, success and glory, hung on that tragic event. The Cross, the Cross of Jesus, is after all the centre around which the highest interest of heaven and all the hopes of man revolve.

Dear friends, our life is a calamity, heaven a disappointing dream, and even the Christ himself nothing to us, but for that decease which He accomplished at Jerusalem. The Cross of Jesus, though bare and barren in itself, with Him outstretched and dying upon it in our stead, is the very Tree of Life on which our Paradise depends. All mercy, love and glory for our fallen world issue from thence. Nor are we in accord with the mind and feeling of heaven, nor in fit condition to join the blessed fellowship of the glorified, until we have learned to view and hold that as the Alpha and Omega of our faith, and the foundation of our best and highest hopes.

Great and glorious things await the people of God. "Unto them that look for Him will Christ

appear the second time without sin unto salvation." But it is all built upon the one great transaction which has made Calvary so dear to every Christian heart. And as we look forward to the closing of this present world, let us make sure of shelter under our Redeemer's Cross ; for on that our eternal salvation hangs.

The Cross ! it takes our guilt away ;
It holds the fainting spirit up ;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day,
And sweetens every bitter cup.

The balm of life, the cure of woe,
The measure and the pledge of love,
The sinner's refuge here below,
The angels' theme in heaven above.

THE END.

p. 72.

117

45

